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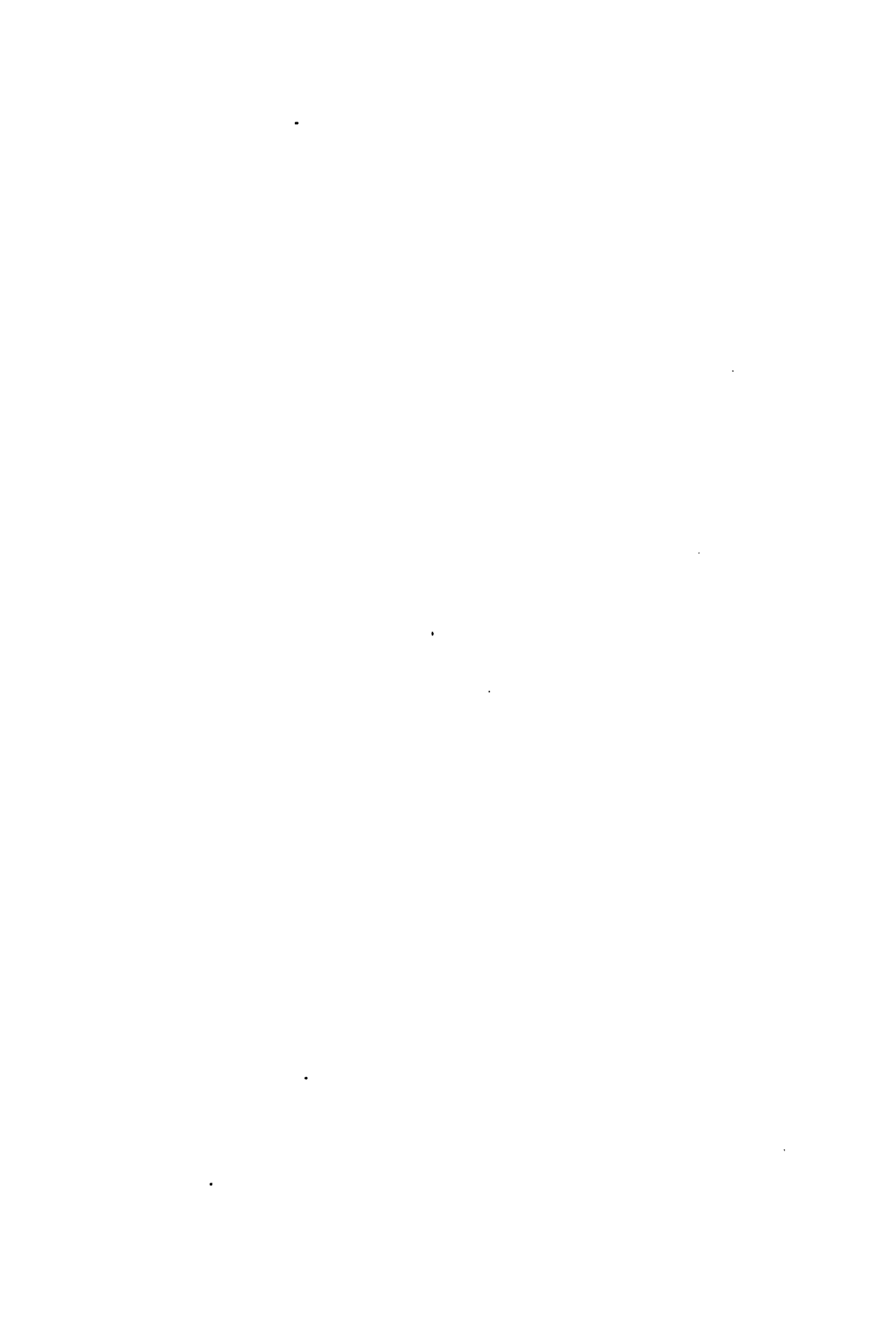
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48. 418.







Albert Smith.

My dear Mr. Smith,

THE
STRUGGLES AND ADVENTURES
OF
CHRISTOPHER TADPOLE
AT HOME AND ABROAD.

BY ALBERT SMITH,

AUTHOR OF

"THE ADVENTURES OF MR. LEDBURY," "THE FORTUNES OF THE SCATTERGOOD
FAMILY," "THE MARCHIONESS OF BRINVILLIERS," &c. &c.

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TO
MR. SERGEANT TALFOURD, M.P.

MY DEAR SIR,

THE kind manner in which you have, more than once, spoken to me of my literary productions has been, I can assure you, my greatest encouragement, during their progress. Not only on this account, however, but as a small mark of the respect and esteem I feel towards you and your amiable family—to whom I am in debt for so much that is agreeable—I beg to dedicate this Volume to you. And that its author may long enjoy the pleasure of your friendship is the sincere wish of

Yours most faithfully,

ALBERT SMITH.

LONDON,
NOVEMBER, 1847.

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THE
STRUGGLES AND ADVENTURES
OF
CHRISTOPHER TADPOLE.

THE PRELUDE: WHICH MUST BE RECOLLECTED TOWARDS THE END
OF THE STORY.



ARE old city of Chester! Even in these days of rocket-like travelling a man might fly all over Great Britain and Ireland, with an extra day ticket for Berwick-upon-Tweed, before he saw anything half so fine as the mouldering old red sand-stones which form the walls and towers of that venerable place; or looked upon anything half so fair as the prospect of vale and mountain, wooded headland and spire-pointed plain, that surrounds it.

It is, in veriest sooth, a glorious relic of the early times, when the British Lion was a mere awkward cub, and the lady whom he protects,—whose most authentic portraits we are now only acquainted with from the half-penny of infantile reward,—had not even arrived at the fatal period of a certain age. You might almost conceive that it had stood the attacks of Time so long, as at last to disgust him altogether with the uselessness of his endeavours to destroy it; and that he had consequently gone away at some epoch far back in the darkness of the days of old, and never cared to come back again to the neighbourhood.

For there are its old black beams and carved uneven gables—its quaint supports and discoloured panes of glass, quivering and blinking in the wide rickety casements—its overhanging floors and rude, uneven steps and pavement, just as they were when the History of England would scarcely have made a tract long enough to last the lounge round upon the city walls, along whose whole extent the city huntsman once rode in ten minutes. And there is its Cathedral, whose tower of corroded, ruddy masonry, appears even in dull weather, to be glowing in a perpetual sunset, in the enjoyment of a calm old age. And the cloisters, whilst they teach a lesson on decay, have the same tranquil look, communicating their repose to the loiterer—harassed and heart-weary as he may be—in their still seclusion; engendering hope and peace, and calling

forth all the better feelings. The hum of the peopled city does not break the reigning quietude. The grass is fresh and green in the enclosure; and a few fragile climbing flowers wind their delicate stems about the worn fretwork, and nestle in the indentations of the tracery as the shadows of their leaves tremble in the patches of light that fall pleasantly upon the gravestones and pavement below.

A marvellous city too is commercial, every-day, common-place Chester—that is, if it can be so. For the passenger's footway lies right through the first floor fronts of the houses—which are cleared away altogether, and above the shop, of ordinary normal position, by the road-side; and thus, the back drawing-rooms, or whatever else they may be, are turned into more shops; and great is the puzzle of the stranger as to whether the road-way is down in the cellar, or he is up stairs on the landing, or the house has turned itself out of window; affording a literal proof of that curious state of domestic affairs so often spoken of. And first he fancies the 'row'—as it is termed—is like the Quadrant, with the road excavated a floor lower, and shops made under the pavement; and then it reminds him of a Thames-side tavern, with all the shutter wainscoats, that divide the large convivial room into so many little philandering ones, drawn away, and the windows knocked out. And, finally, he arrives at the conclusion that there is nothing else in the world at all like it, except the lithographs published by the enterprising librarians who live there.

But very convenient is this arrangement for old ladies of weak minds who quail at meeting cattle: and young ladies of extravagant ones who dote on shopping, in spite of the weather. For it raises the first above suspicion even of danger; and shelters the second from being favoured with the visits of the clouds, who cannot here drop in upon them. And so, we opine, that umbrellas are yet unknown in Chester; and clogs and pattens are things to look and wonder at, worthy of a place in the museum of the Water Tower. One only inconvenience do the rows present: convivial gentlemen, who won't go home till morning, under ordinary social circumstances, must be apt to descend suddenly into the valleys, which here and there break their continuity in the shape of bye-streets. But this may be amended in time by the good gentlemen, who pay such pen-and-ink attention to the sanitary condition of large towns, and form a grotto for Hygeia at the bottom of an inkstand.

Even the chronicles of Chester are as quaint as the place. Think of King Edward the First, when he was here, in 1277, ordering that every body who could spend twenty pounds a year should be made a knight! Why, you might have stopped at a hostelry then, and ordered a 'Sir' to bring you a Jack of humming ale; or bought your hood, or jerkin, of a real 'Lady' at the first shop you chose to turn in at. Read on, too, how in 1356, the Mayor's feast, comprising all the delicacies of the season, cost only eleven shillings and ten-pence! A happy time was that for his Lordship; the most unrelenting, begrudging Common Council that ever assembled would not have denied him a banquet every day had he chosen to have had one. And some hundred years after this there was a famine; and the people made bread of—*feathers*—

the only circumstance under which the citizens would not wish their bread to be "down again." And we might tell, moreover, how in the fifteenth century, a goose was eaten on the top of the St. Peter's steeple by the parson and his friends: how, in 1541, the members of the corporation were to be chosen from the 'saddest and most substantial citizens': how a score and a half of years afterwards the sheriffs fought, and whacked each other soundly with their wands until they were broken: and how a man was confined in Northgate for publicly stating a great scandal about Queen Elizabeth, which nothing should induce us to write down in detail; but be sure that the Earl of Leicester had a great deal—if not all—to do with it. We might ponder over these things, and many more; as duly set forth by careful local historians. But our story is of the present time; and we would have you, consequently, forget the Chester of the middle ages; and cherish no more of its reminiscences than will inevitably force themselves upon you when standing in its busy streets of the present day; when its rock-based fortifications form a peaceful walk, and the prolongation of life, instead of slaughter, is their object; when reclaimed green-swards and broad corn-fields lie where the river Dee once came up to the city; and the heavy dogged barge is pulled along the canal, or the steam-train flies—screaming, panting, and glowing—on the railway beneath the walls. To Chester then, apart from its associations, and at a period not beyond the average recollection of all who may read our tale.

It was a wild dark evening in March. Unless the almanack had informed one that spring was coming on, nobody would ever have believed it from the specimen-prospectus it issued of its intentions: perhaps as near the truth, however, as a prospectus generally is. It was much more likely, that winter, being on the eve of breaking up and going away, was having a grand finishing bit of fun to himself, and knocking every thing about, right and left, as boys at school, in similar circumstances, do the inkstands, forms, and slates, as well as every thing that the usher may unguardedly leave about pertaining to himself.

The wind came in wonderful gusts, surging after one another, like the waves of a mighty aerial sea: breaking into separate blasts as it struck against the sturdy, rugged edges of the towers that encountered it, until each of them became a separate tempest on a small scale, and pervaded every street, without apparent regard to any particular point of the compass, turning signs upside down, roaring and brawling along the covered rows; and sparring right and left with what few lamps it encountered—the lights of which had a hard time of it—for very wilfulness. The rain would have come down if it could, but the wind would not give it a chance; so it was obliged to be content with shooting down a few large drops between the squalls, and then being blown into mist, was carried away, against its will to the Welsh mountains, to sit up all night, and form the fogs of the morning.

Not many people were about. The shops had long closed, for the keepers expected no more customers; and the very inns had put up their public-room shutters in hopeless despair of fresh travellers, when

a country vehicle drove somewhat hurriedly into the yard of one of the hotels, and startled the ostler from his pipe and shove-halfpenny in the tap, by the announcement of its arrival; which, whoever the mysterious agent is who rings the bell upon the advent of a stranger to an inn, took care he should hear. The man lumbered out, and there he saw an old fashioned headed-chaise, with a lantern tied to the centre of the splash-board, whose candle was all but burnt out, but yet gave sufficient light to shew the distressed condition of the horse, who had evidently been driven so hard that his muddy, quivering form was scarcely visible through the steam that enveloped him.

"There—there's no occasion for all that row," said a voice from within the head of the chaise. "You couldn't make more if it was a carriage and four. I don't mean to spend much here, so that bell won't frighten me into doing it, by making me believe I'm of importance. I know all your tricks."

And then, as the driver and ostler exchanged a wink in the stream of light from the tap window, a bundle of rusty blue serge with a hat on the top of it, rose from beneath the apron, and somehow or another contrived to get down to the ground.

"Do you want a bed here to-night, Sir?" asked the waiter who stood at the side entrance of the inn, making a shot at the sex of the blue serge bundle.

"I don't know—quite depends upon where you put me," replied the voice. "None of your cocklofts for me if I stay—none of your 39's and four pair back staircase passages looking on to nothing. Ooff!"

This last exclamation accompanied the action of throwing off the serge wrapper, and violently pulling what appeared to be a small folded blanket from about the neck. And the landlady and waiter now saw that the stranger was in male attire; and to judge from the exertion he used had narrowly escaped being strangled by his own neckcloth, then and there.

He was a small, bony man—much smaller than the blue serge bundle had led the inn-people to suppose; and whether his age had been whispered to you as five-and-twenty, or fifty-two, you would have been equally satisfied: for it would have been impossible to have denied either. His cheek-bones were high, and his eyes placed remarkably close together, which gave him the look of a fox or rat: and his hair, which was of a cold red—if artists will allow such a tint—was trained into a species of cone that rose from his forehead: whilst his whiskers were continued under his chin in a sort of peak, giving him the appearance that a pantaloon might be supposed to present in social life, before he had been powdered for public effect.

"Where's the coffee-room, eh?" he inquired of the waiter sharply.

The man requested he would follow him: upon which he took a travelling desk from the chaise, and went after the attendant into the public room.

It always struck us, that the writer who tried to invest an inn with

such an idea of comfort, made a great mistake: and so have all those, who, in the sturdiest spirit of conventionality, still believe they believe so. Light and warmth, after a cold night journey, make an inn comfortable: so would be a brick-kiln, or a glass-house, or a blacksmith's shed under similar circumstances. But the feeling upon arriving at an inn in the day time, when you know you have got to stay there is, to us, irresistibly depressing. The utter isolation in the midst of bustle is bad enough in itself: but every thing about you makes it worse. The chilling sideboard with its formal array of glasses—the thorough Swiss of the household, whose services can only be procured by paying for; the empty tea-caddy, and imperfect backgammon board; the utter absence of any thing to beguile even two minutes, beyond a local directory, a provincial Journal of last Saturday, or Paterson's roads. The staring unfeeling pattern of the very paper, and, in the majority of country places, the dreariness of the look out: the clogged inkstand and stumped pens; the inability to protract a meal to six hours to get rid of the day; and above all, the anticipation of a strange bed with curtains you cannot manage, and pillows you are not accustomed to, and sheets of unusual fabric—all these discomforts—and a score more that we could enumerate—keep us from ever falling into that state of rampant happiness at an inn, which popular delusion assign to a sojourn therein.

But certainly these feelings did not much affect the new comer, who entered the coffee-room; threw the blue serge, hat, and desk upon the table; and then gave the fire a poke, which brought every bit of fuel it contained into fresh company, just as if he had been at his own home, and inventing a miniature eruption of Vesuvius, with his own coals, for his own private amusement.

"Don't light those candles," he said to the waiter in the same sharp tones. "I know what wax candles are at these houses—two shillings an inch. Turn up the gas, and I'll have the table under the lamp."

He would have done it himself, but he was not tall enough. The waiter obeyed him, and then began to arrange invisible objects, and put nothing into its proper place, as he waited for orders.

"What can I have to eat?" asked the traveller, "Eh?"

"Any thing you like, Sir," was the reply.

"No, I can't," added the other in the same quick accents. "You know I can't. Suppose, I said, I should like a duck and peas. I can have that, I suppose, you'll say. Eh?"

"Very nice duck," answered the waiter, in a tone of mild triumph; and then he added vaguely, "Did you mean green peas, Sir?"

"Why—you don't suppose I wanted them split—or parched. No, I won't have the duck—half roasted last week upon chance, and then burnt up in a hurry. Ha—soups!" he read, as his eye fell upon a placard on the mantel-piece. "Very well—bring me some mock-turtle. And look here—no beef-tea with lumps of calves' head in it—real mock-turtle you know—eh?"

The waiter left to give the order, and then the little man walked impatiently up and down the room, now and then going to the window and

trying, as he drew the dingy blind on one side, to peer into the obscurity without. In a few minutes the other returned, and commenced laying the cloth.

The waiter was an oddity, and appeared to have been started with the house, which was no modern tenement. He was old, and bald, and all his clothes were a great deal too large for him and exceedingly old-fashioned and dingy; and he carried his head poking forwards, as though he had passed all his life in the pillory, and was just let out for a holiday. He had an odd, comical way, too, of blinking his eyes when he spoke, which made one nervous to look at him: but this was of less consequence, as he never returned the compliment by turning his head towards anybody he was addressing.

"Many people in the house?" asked the traveller, as he established himself in front of the fire-place, and with great difficulty got his heels on to the mantelpiece above his head, so that with his coat-tails hanging down behind him he looked, to any body at the other end of the room, something like the letter Y of the initial gentlemen whose portraits used to be in Bowles and Carver's print-shop, in remarkable states of disjointed uneasiness, next the Day of Judgment, and Death and the Lady.

"Not so many, Sir," answered the waiter, who was placing the cruets, and knives and forks upon the table with great precision, as if he intended afterwards to dance a fandango amongst them. "Two hardware gents, and a pottery—men of no mind, Sir—wear too big buttons and too far apart."

The traveller gave a low, single-knock laugh, which might have passed just as well for a cough, or a hiccup. And then he said, with a stare of semi-surprise at the man:

"What do you call yourself—eh?"

"Well—I don't know, Sir; I never have occasion to do it. I leave that to the customers, and they always call me, Bob—leastwise when they know me."

"And that's your name then—eh?"

"I expect it must be: it wasn't once, I know: but every body says it is now, and I daren't tell them they're wrong. But what's in a name—nothing, bless you, except for fish-sauce and soda-water. Oh, you won't—won't you!"

The last words were addressed to a refractory cayenne bottle, whom a wrong stopper had rendered top-heavy, and who persisted in tumbling over his frame in a sadly dissipated fashion. But Bob—as we may presume he may now be called—cuffed the refractory cruet about, as he would have done a child, until he got him to assume a proper position. And, indeed, the table furniture might be said to compose his family; for there was a retired nook in the coffee-room which formed the private residence of all the salt-cellar, cruets, toothpicks, and tumblers, to which Bob himself retreated when he was not wanted, sitting complacently amongst them, as though they had been so many members of his domestic circle, who required the same care and attention as a large nursery establishment.

In a minute or two the soup was brought, and the stranger took his

place at the table, and began his supper. There was still a restless anxious appearance about him. He kept looking at the clock, then at his own watch; and then went again to the window, and returned. But before he had finished his meal, there was a noise of wheels in the street, rapidly approaching, and a carriage stopped at the door of the inn. The bell rang again, and this time very loudly:—the landlady and servants collected in the passage; and the inmates of the vehicle alighted.

One of these was a man in the prime of life, and above the middle stature. He was so muffled up that his features were scarcely discernible: but sufficient was visible to shew that they were well formed and expressive. He leaped hurriedly from the carriage, and then assisted a female to alight, and half led, half carried her into the passage. Despite the rich cloak in which she was closely wrapped, it could be perceived that she was suffering acutely. Every muscle of her fair young face was contracted with pain: her lips were parted: and her breathing hurried and tremulous, at times breaking into a quick, low wail of agony. As she came into the entrance of the inn, she sank down upon one of the hall chairs; and clutching the arm of her companion would have fallen back, almost insensible, against the wall, had not the landlady come forward to support her head.

"A room directly—any one," said the gentleman, with an impatient oath, as the chambermaids were canvassing the vacancy, or occupation of any of the differently numbered apartments. "A room—and a medical man. Run for the nearest."

"Doctor Aston is in the bar," replied the hostess, "waiting to go back home. He will, I know, attend to the lady immediately."

And she ran back to the bar to call the surgeon, who resided at a town some fifteen miles from Chester walls; whilst, the gentleman, taking his suffering companion in his arms, as if she had been an infant, carried her up stairs to the chamber appointed for her. And when he had placed her on the bed, he left the room, as the medical attendant arrived, telling the landlady that he would wait in the coffee-room to see him, as soon as he could report on the state of his patient; and thither he descended.

During this scene, which took far less time to act than to describe, the little man with the red hair had been in a state of great excitement. The soup remained unfinished and, in his absence of mind with an apparent lingering habit of an habitual profession, he stuck the spoon behind his ear, and ran to the door, peeping through the aperture, as he opened it a little way, and then closing it rapidly, when he thought any of the parties bent their eyes in the direction. At last, when he saw the gentleman coming down stairs towards the coffee-room, he rushed back to his seat; and began to read a back number of the Chester Chronicle, which he held topsy-turvy with great apparent attention, until the other entered; and then he looked up over it, and exclaimed, with a grin: "What a strange meeting, Sir Frederick; quite——"

"Hish!" said the person addressed, somewhat sharply. "Not a whisper of my name; or you will damn everything."

"A right—I'm—you know," replied the other.

It was as well the person addressed as Sir Frederick did know; for other people might have found some difficulty in doing so, from the mere imitation of drawing a cork with his mouth and finger, which the small man indulged in to enlighten him as to his intentions.

"Call me Mr. Howard—Edwards—anything you like but my name."

"Mr. Howard Edwards then," replied the little man, dropping his voice. "How's it going on? All right, eh? There's no secrets between us you know. Where are you from?"

"The last stage, the whole way from Flint; when she was taken ill. It has upset all my plans: I cannot tell what to do."

"It's provoking," said the other. "I have seen all the papers, and read the will. The estate is the finest in Surrey—there—see that."

And he drew a small slip of paper from a pocket-book covered with figures and calculations, and placed it in his companion's hands.

"That's not so bad—is it? Seven thousand a year, and I only ask five hundred out of it, if all goes off smoothly."

Mr. Edwards, as the other had called him, paid no apparent attention to the last part of the speech: but walked rapidly once or twice up and down the coffee-room with his eye fixed on the paper. Then leaning his arm on the end of the mantel-piece, still gazing on it, he said,

"Gudge."

"Sir Freder—, Mr. Edwards, I'm all ears."

"I have no objection to agree to your request, but there will be certain terms to dictate on my part. We need not be juggling with one another. This affair has been your own suggestion; and benefits you, with myself, if it succeeds. Now tell me—what brought you here to-night?"

"Well—to be frank," said Mr. Gudge, as he kicked a bit of coal with his toe, knocking a rugged precipice he had been imagining, amidst the bars, into a blazing ruined castle. "I came to meet you, hearing at Holyhead that you were on the wing. I guessed where you were off to."

"And where was that?"

"France—Paris, you know; and then—where's that place you put babies into a conjuring box—turn'em round three times, and catch'em again if you can. I've not lived for nothing, you know. No—no."

Mr. Gudge chuckled as he spoke, and tucked his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat. The other looked at him, with an expression of the deepest disgust; and then bit his under lip fretfully. He would have replied to him, but for the entrance of Bob, who told Mr. Edwards that the Doctor wished to speak to him in the passage immediately. He accordingly left the room, and the waiter and Mr. Gudge remained alone.

"Regular go, up above," said Bob; "running up and down stairs like lamplighters. Can't make it out—I can't. Do you sleep here, Sir?"

"Think I shall," replied Mr. Gudge, shortly. "You don't charge anything for tables in the coffee-room, I suppose, do you?"

"No—I don't," answered Bob. "Missus does, what she thinks proper. It's all optical with me."

"Well—then I shall sit up all night," said Mr. Gudge; "I'm not going to bed in any of your garrets;—two shillings, I suppose, for the use of a pair of damp sheets—chambermaid, a shilling—boots, sixpence—three and six. Look at that!"

"Where, Sir?" inquired Bob, carrying his eyes all about the room, as if he was looking after something wonderful; "they don't often leave it about here."

"Now don't be too clever; take these things away."

"Don't much like the soup, Sir?" said Bob, half-inquiring, half-observing, as he gazed at the half-finished basin.

"No, I don't," replied Mr. Gudge; "it's the most wretched mess I ever swallowed."

"So it is, Sir," said Bob, looking into the plate; "very bad, I must say. I wonder missus sends up such things."

The coincidence of opinion disarmed further abuse; but Mr. Gudge was very angry, and he exclaimed:

"If you don't take it away directly, I shall pitch it through the window."

"Don't you think I'd better find a boy to catch it first, Sir?" said the other; "there's lots of them would jump at it outside."

For Bob began to see it was necessary to treat the customer in a congenial spirit; anticipating but little,—with that peculiar foresight of individuals living upon fees—from his generosity.

"Take it away!" roared Mr. Gudge, lighting up all over like a fire-work, "and bring me a screw."

"Don't allow screws here, Sir," returned the imperturbable waiter, with some emphasis; "you can have them in the tap, if you like. Cigars—capital, good—in the bar. Wouldn't you like one?"

"Oh! if it comes to that I've got my own," replied Mr. Gudge, triumphantly pulling a melancholy looking weed from the lining of his hat, and getting on a chair to light it at the lamp. "There—now leave me. I shall stay here as long as I like—it's a public room—and I can wash for nothing when I get shaved to-morrow in the city."

The waiter stared at his strange customer; and then, with a shrug, for his own private relief, took up the tray, and walked slowly out of the room; whilst the little man lighted the thin, dried up cigar he had brought forth, and once more getting his heels over the mantel-piece, enveloped himself in a cloud of cheap, rank vapour. And then he blew out the smoke into strange fashions; and rolled the cigar about in his mouth; and puffed, and snorted, and poked his pen-knife though the end of it; and broke the ash off upon his boot, as he held it between his two middle fingers; and looked at its glowing extremity until it went out during his contemplation of other matters. And next he lighted it again at the lamp, coquetting with the gas as he jerked it through the flame, as though he wanted to keep it from being lighted

instead of desiring that process, with all the other conventional performances which cigar smokers feel bound to indulge in.

Meanwhile the medical man and Mr. Edwards met in the passage.

"How is your patient, Doctor?" asked the latter, eagerly. "Do you think she can proceed on a journey this evening?"

"My dear Sir," replied the other, "she must not leave her room. You cannot understand the case, I am sure. Excuse me; the lady—she is your wife?"

The surgeon spoke in a hesitating manner, as though he mistrusted the answer that would be given. The other was more confused; he commenced a few incoherent sentences, and at last said, somewhat impetuously—

"That is nothing to the purpose. I wish you to pay her every attention. You need not be afraid of your remuneration."

"You have mistaken me, Sir," said the Doctor, mildly, as he withdrew; "you appear to forget that it is a professional man, and not a mere trader, that you are addressing. You may, however, rely upon my attention; and I believe it may be needed—to the fullest."

"I have spoken too quickly," replied Mr. Edwards. "I did not mean to hurt you, Sir; but I am much harassed at present. I hope you will pass this over."

The doctor was about to reply, when the landlady emerged from the room into which the young female traveller had been taken, and requested him to come in directly. He entered; and then the other began to pace the long, gloomy corridor at the top of the staircase, pausing to listen every time that he approached the door, to the loud wail of pain that came through it. Several times his hand was on the lock to enter, and once he knocked; but the door was merely opened a few inches by the hostess, who, upon seeing him, without a word, shook her head, closed it quickly, and left him to pursue his restless promenade.

In this manner a quarter of an hour passed, at the end of which the medical man again appeared, and told him he might enter, begging him, at the same time, to do so as noiselessly as possible, for that the patient, he had reason to suppose, was in great danger. With a quickened and flurried respiration he entered the room, where the first sound that fell upon his ear was the shrill cry of a newly-born infant, which the landlady was attending to, assisted by one of the female domestics, before the smoking hastily-lighted fire in the grate. The noise appeared to shock him for an instant; he asked quickly "if it was a girl or a boy?" and then, upon being answered that it was the latter, he approached the bedside, and took his seat by the pillow of the patient, breathing quickly and audibly, as a deep frown wrinkled his forehead.

The pale, and almost lifeless girl—for such she was in years—feebly opened her eyes as he approached, and looked towards him; and then, when she saw the dark expression of his face, as if conceiving that he was the sufferer, and she had caused his discomfort—with one earnest effort, she threw her arms round his neck, and laid her fair face upon



Scene from "The Two Pigeons"

his shoulder, as a profusion of glossy silken hair rippled down about it. For her light travelling bonnet only had been removed, and her long bright tresses were lying in golden lattice-work upon her pillow. But the convulsive exertion was too much for her;—the next instant her head dropped down, and she was entirely supported in his arms.

"She has fainted," said the worthy Doctor, who had, during this short scene, been standing at the foot of the bed, but who now approached his patient. "My dear Sir," he added, with that soothing tone of apparent unconcern, which all of his profession can assume with such admirable effect, when coolness and presence of mind are found in none other of the bystanders, "you must allow me to exert my prerogative, and let me order you to leave the room. Our patient is in danger—*great danger*"—and he laid a marked emphasis on the word—"do me the favour to retire for a little while."

He placed his hand kindly on Mr. Edwards' shoulder, as with the other arm he supported the patient, and lifted her back again to her pillow. The gentleman immediately rose without a word—his demeanour was singularly calm, even to apathy, during this short scene—and moved towards the door; from the half opening of which, any body whose attention had not been otherwise taken up might have seen the head of Mr. Gudge rapidly retreating on his approach, prior to the entire structure of that individual gliding swiftly and quietly down stairs, back to the coffee-room, to compose himself before the other entered. But for this there was no necessity. Mr. Edwards remained pacing up and down the long corridor as before: not anxiously, but with a cold heavy impassable expression; both of features and manner of walking. Indeed, so little occupied did his mind appear to be with what was passing near him, that his sole attention was apparently absorbed by the half obliterated pattern of the oil-cloth that covered the floor, upon the exact centre of the rings of which he gave himself no small trouble to plant his foot as he passed over them.

The moments ticked away, flung into the past at every swing of the pendulum that was vibrating in the old clock-case at the end of the gallery. There was evidently some confusion and anxiety in the room of the sufferer. The landlady and the chambermaid by turns hurried in and out, returning quickly with one article and another they had been to procure; and giving answers, more or less evasive, to the questions of Mr. Edwards as to the state of the patient. At last Dr. Aston came from the room and approaching him, said in short sentences:

"Will you come in? Tread softly—there has been a sudden change."

"For the better?" asked Mr. Edwards quickly.

The doctor shook his head gravely, as he replied: "Sir, you must prepare yourself for the worst. I fear that our poor patient is beyond human aid. You shall see."

They entered the chamber so cautiously, that not a footfall was heard, and once more approached the bed, by which both the

landlady and the domestic were standing, whilst the infant was lying on a pillow placed on the rug before the fire, so entirely covered up, that but for the motion of its limbs, and now and then a subdued cry, it might have been taken for a bundle of flannel.

The object of their solicitude, whose face was completely blanched, opened her eyes faintly as the traveller approached, and appeared about to address him. But she had no longer the power. Whilst she was looking at him, the eyelids drooped until they were almost closed: and the lips quivered and parted; and then, as a sigh escaped from them, remained as though they had been sculptured—as still as marble and almost as white. Doctor Aston placed his fingers on the pulse and kept them there for a minute, and inclined his head towards the face of the patient. There was no sign of respiration; the back of his old silver watch that he placed to the lips remained untarnished by the breath, and as he gently raised an eyelid, the pupil was fixed and dilated.

"It is all over," he said, almost inaudibly, as he turned away towards Mr. Edwards; appearing almost afraid to speak the words, although conscious of the necessity of doing so.

He had anticipated—in spite of the previous calm—one of those terrible outbursts of mental agony, of which those of his profession are so frequently the spectators—which are sometimes the more fearful, even appalling, in inverse proportion to the previous stoicism. But he was mistaken. The traveller drew in a long quivering breath; and then his respiration stopped, until it became painful to the bystanders to listen for its return. His face flushed, and his eyeballs were strained, as though they would have started from their orbits; until he relieved his breast by a violent and sudden effort. Then turning to Dr. Aston, he said:

"It may be a trance; you will pardon me, but—are you quite certain—are you sure—that—she is dead?"

The medical man lifted up the sheet, and turned it over the lifeless face, in reply. The countenance of the other betrayed the slightest emotion—as transient as it was unfathomable—and he remained gazing upon the dreary outline which the body formed under its covering. Just then a shrill cry broke from the infant; and the hostess, who had been in tears, in company with the servant at the foot of the bed—not from any particular feeling of grief, but from a custom all females of a certain sphere think it imperative on them to keep up under similar circumstances—once more took it in her arms.

The sound attracted the attention of Mr. Edwards. A frown wrinkled his forehead as he heard it; but it passed the next minute, as he advanced towards Doctor Aston, and said in a low tone:

"I shall feel obliged if you will speak with me for a few minutes in private." And he added, in a louder voice to the hostess: "And let some of your people order a fresh chaise and horses to be got ready; directly!"

CHAPTER I.

OF THE GREAT SOIRÉE GIVEN AT THE PARTHENON.

TEN years! How much of bright sunshine and gloomiest depression—what fitting days of happiness, and long sad hours of pain and sorrow—what changes in the most united homes, where change was never thought of; and old ties broken, and new associations formed and cherished in their places—how large a chapter in the romance of every life may not that period comprise!

And yet, with all its lights and shadows, we look back upon it, and no longer time appears to have elapsed, than since the finish of the last chapter. For, struggling ever onward—toiling up towards some air-built goal never to be attained—the past, which but now formed the obstacles of the present, crumbles instantly away behind our steps, like the staircase of the Epicurean, as we advance in our progress, falling back into the dark gulf of Time never to be reformed. And every step, which was of such magnitude when we passed it, is forgotten in the collectiveness of retrospection, or the fresh labour we are for ever working forward to, until a passing thought will compass the events of years.

It is ten years then since the epoch of the last chapter: and the medical man, with whom we are already acquainted, was sitting in his little parlour, in the little town before alluded to. Doctor Aston was still a bachelor; but from having brought the whole parish into the world, even to those who now had great grown-up boys and girls of their own, he might be looked upon, and indeed was so, as the head of a very large family. And he was not only the medical attendant, but he had become the confidential friend of nearly all his patients, who sent for him as often to allay family irritation as to heal recognized corporeal complaints. He lived in a small house, quite in the centre of the town, opposite the great inn, and next the bank; and an old housekeeper, with an odd groom, or footman, or, indeed, assistant upon a pinch, formed the human portion of his establishment.

He was very clever in his profession, from long experience; but put no trust in new-fangled remedies which from time to time we read of. For he had seen so many things start up to cure everything, and quietly tumble down again after a short noisy life—with names that nobody but chemists who had written large books and almost chrystallized or sublimed themselves in laboratories by long study could understand; that he only believed in the old-fashioned drugs whose virtues centuries had tried. So that when a crack London physician once prescribed "*Ferrosesquicyanuret* of the cyanide of potassium" upon being called in to a patient, Dr. Aston waited until he was gone, and then said, he would rather trust to rhubarb. And the patient got rapidly well.

cheering continued, Mr. Saunders got up and bowed to the company; with such a look at the same time to a young lady on the front benches, who had very bright eyes and glossy hair, which proved that science is not always proof against pretty faces. But the flirtation was stopped by Mr. Buffles, the secretary, who pulled Mr. Saunders back and said, "Pray—pray, Saunders; be quiet! this is not a time for tom-foolery!"

Dr. Aston was warmly welcomed. He made a short speech, saying that no doubt they were anxious to become acquainted with the eminent individuals who were about to honour them with their presence, and then he took his seat, as the secretary introduced Mr. Tweel, a gentleman from Manchester, who was followed by an intelligent friend, carrying a machine which looked something like a set of cotton-reels arranged for a country-dance, and which being set in motion by a handle, produced a loud and continuous rattle as they ran in and out, and amidst one another, as the people do when Sir Roger de Coverley is not known very well.

Mr. Tweel lectured as follows: his declamation being accompanied, like that of the revived Greek tragedies, with certain sounds from instruments.

"Ladies and Gentlemen,

"The manufactures of one's country—(*off went the reels, as if they were all trying to tie themselves in knots*)—that proud pre-eminence over foreign markets—(*the reels were perfectly delirious in their excitement*)—the art of making braid—(*another desperate rattle, at the end of which the intelligent friend pulled out a silk watchguard six feet long from the confusion*),—and there you see the process of making the flat braid."

"That's to say making his friend do it," said Mr. Saunders to the secretary. Mr. Buffles did not move a muscle.

"Don't you see?" said Mr. Saunders, who was not to be put down, giving the other gentleman one of those pleasant nudges which funny men will inflict upon you, when you don't laugh; "Making the *flat* braid you know; that is, making his friend braid: 'flat'—that's where the point is. Not so bad, is it?"

"Mr. Saunders," said the secretary, virtuously indignant, "if you have no mind to appreciate science, others have."

But Mr. Saunders was not yet extinguished; for the next moment he had tied his pocket-handkerchief round his hand, making a Turk of the finger, who kept bowing to the young lady on the front row, until Mr. Tweel and the intelligent friend had brought the dance of reels to a satisfactory conclusion, and retired amidst the applause of the audience, who were very much gratified at being taught how to make braid.

The exhibition of manufactures continued; and the buzz had scarcely subsided, when the Secretary introduced an old gentleman, in a very dirty face and shirt-sleeves, who came on to the platform, followed by two men bringing on a very elaborate apparatus like a spinning-wheel seen through a magnifying glass, which the company were informed was a machine used by potters to make mugs, the process of which would now be shown.

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"Very common word, 'mugs'" said Mr. Saunders, still vital, to the Secretary; "I hope he's not going to make ugly mugs. Why can't he say, the process of modelling busts, or faces? Much better than making mugs."

"Did you address this balderdash to me, Sir?" said Mr. Buffles, getting indignant beyond measure.

"Not that I know of," said Mr. Saunders. "Hush! don't make such a noise. I can't see if you do."

And Mr. Buffles, in his nervous excitement, chancing at that minute to upset the inkstand, Mr. Saunders called out "Order!" and looked at a little girl very severely, to shew that it was not Mr. Buffles—of course not—that he was calling to account.

The apparatus was fixed; the wheel was turned; and the workman commenced spattering a quantity of white mud amidst the company, as he demonstrated centrifugal force rather than the manufacture of crockery. At length he came to a sudden stop, whilst as yet nothing like a mug appeared on the stand; and rising from his seat with some little difficulty, he, to the consternation of the Committee thus addressed the audience—in tones, which proved, as Mr. Saunders observed, that he had been all the evening moistening his own clay instead of that he was to work upon.

"I'm not going to stand this no longer. (*Sensation.*) It's all very well for you, but I takes in a newspaper, and knows my rights, and am quite as good as any of you. (*The potter snapped his fingers at the audience. The Committee got alarmed, and Mr. Buffles assumed a warlike attitude with a pen, which showed that he would defend the company or die. Mr. Saunders simply exclaimed, "Here's a rich treat!" and then cried out "Bravo!"*) I'm not going to be put down by nobody. I'm a son of labour, and we're the true masters of the world, and knows our right position; and what's more, we means to keep it."

The intention was, however, stronger than the power; for the intelligent artisan, as certain newspapers would have called him, not being very well able to keep on his legs, seated himself upon the clay on the wheel, and commenced incoherently abusing the company generally. There was terrible consternation amidst the audience: the ladies in front, not being able to retreat, screamed, and rushed upon the platform, where they formed interesting groups with the Committee. Mr. Saunders directly protected the young lady with the bright eyes, in the fashion usually adopted in a waltz, but without the waltzing; and Mr. Buffles, making sure that the Committee were behind him, seized the free-thinking potter by the collar, and, with the assistance of the others, dragged him away.

It was some time before order was restored; but when Dr. Aston, in his usual mild manner, had tried to turn the affair off in a half-jocular manner, and assured the ladies that there was no fear of fire:—in which the gentler sex comprise every alarm given in a public place, even if the assembly was in the Thames Tunnel, or any other place not very likely to be burnt down—the business of the evening proceeded.

"Mr. Saunders will now oblige us with his paper on Botany,"

said Dr. Aston. "May I request your attention, ladies and gentleman."

"Now for my go in," said Mr. Saunders: "I'll astonish them—rather. Nib your pen, Buffles, and put it all down. It's worth it, I can tell you."

And Mr. Saunders advanced to the front of the platform, and bowed to the company, as he smiled at the young lady. He was loudly applauded, for he was a favourite with the members, having always set his face against "slow" lectures and discussions; and maintaining that Literary Institutions were for the purposes of harmony and amusement, rather than the spread of knowledge. For as much of the latter article, he was wont to say, as ever was wanted could be got anywhere for a penny; and, as he also observed, like a new roll, was generally very filling at the price. When the reception had subsided, Mr. Saunders again bowed; blew his nose; could not put his handkerchief back again; and proceeded.

MR. SAUNDERS'S PAPER.

"Ladies and Gentlemen;

"The science of Botany—like the beauty of an eminent political character—requires only to be known to be appreciated."

Here Mr. Buffles, who had not recovered the late excitement, took a moss rose from a tumbler of water, drank the water, replaced the rose, and then began to write.

"For want of botanical knowledge," continued Mr. Saunders, "scarcely a week passes but our friends—nay, those dearest to us—sit down upon the leaves of the nettle, ignorant of its peculiar properties; and cooks, in their noviciate, ingenuously serve up steaks with toad-stool sauce for the refreshment of the weary traveller in picturesque roadside inns."

There was here a great manifestation of feeling; and one old lady in front shed a tear, overcome by Mr. Saunders's touching pathos.

"In the short space of our Lecture, it would be as impossible to teach you the whole science of Botany, as it would be to put the sun and moon into a pill-box, one to be taken every twelve hours."

Mr. Saunders waited an instant, very properly, for the company to laugh, and then proceeded:

"I shall, therefore, just lay before you as much as I happen to think of; skipping, like a flea—if the ladies will permit me to use the industrious entymological simile—over the whole body of my subject."

A gentleman of nervous susceptibility, in spectacles and gaiters, on the platform, scratched his leg from the force of imagination.

"Allow me," said Mr. Saunders, "in the first place, to contradict a popular error. Green peas are not the produce of the mint plant. Ladies often think they are, because the leaves of mint are usually found boiled with peas; but it is not so. Having set you right on this point, allow me humbly to hope that I am not taking up your time—that valuable time that grows upon no bank, either wild or otherwise."

There was very loud applause and laughter, and they all said,

"Go on!" except Mr. Buffles, who did not see much in it, and never liked Mr. Saunders. That gentleman resumed:—

"Plants, like maids-of-all-work, have a wonderful power of adapting themselves to strange places. I shall follow up the remark by talking about something else."

Here somebody's hat fell down from the gallery upon the head of Mr. Buffles; and there was a general laugh, but it was not known whether it was at the lecture or the accident. Dr. Aston knocked his hammer loudly on the table.

"Trees," Mr. Saunders went on, "are of various kinds; some are termed mechanical trees: such are termed the Boot Tree, and the Axle Tree. In addition to these we have the Pewter Tree, the fruit of which serves for measures at our various public-houses. There is a very fine specimen to be seen in the yard of the White Hart."

Applause from the umbrella of the landlord, who was in the room, and decided that Mr. Saunders should be asked what he would take to drink the next time he passed.

"The Pewter Tree (*Arbor Puterifera* of Linnæus), is easily transplanted. It requires very little industry or science for its cultivation, and is, therefore, I regret to say, very suitable for those sad neighbourhoods where malt liquor is in too great request."

The landlord here rescinded his determination; but a teetotaller in the pit applauded rapturously. Thus it is in every position of public life; to please one party it is necessary to offend another, in which act much of the imparted gratification lies.

"You have heard of the sensitive plant, 'Venus's fly trap,' which catches blue-bottles as well as the laziest schoolboy, or as ladies' smiles capture hearts. (Here Mr. Saunders gazed at the young lady, and all the younger committee-men applauded loudly, as each looked at his particular attraction amongst the audience). In the wilds of North America there are trees which possess the power of entrapping men on a similar principle, or rather on no principle at all, for none is known there, except that of vitality. This tree was much cultivated by the venerable Mr. Justice Lynch, since deceased, whence its appellation of 'Judge Lynch's rat-trap.'"

An impressive silence, broken only by subdued expressions of horror, reigned.

"Some plants," continued Mr. Saunders, "possess intoxicating properties. Here is a shrub of this species, the *Frutex Curiosus*, the 'strange plant,' or to speak more familiarly, the 'rum shrub.'"

"Plants when not properly attended to will frequently transplant themselves. Geraniums have a singular dislike to front gardens, and will frequently remove therefrom with remarkable celerity, unless the gates be kept locked to prevent their egress. The inhabitants of London are aware of this, and remove their front parlour hanging-gardens every evening, by which means alone are nasturtions and mignonette preserved."

A gentleman from town told a lady that it was a fact.

"Some plants are wonderfully long lived; the common flag is of this

leaves upon the daisy-spangled turf beneath them—only allowing loopholes for the noontide sunlight to dance and quiver in ever flitting patches of brilliancy—there are now streets and houses, and clusters of life. And, on the other hand, the broad pastures, and wild open wastes, have been cultivated and enclosed : and where the clear water of the Dee rolled over the pebbles of its bed, there are corn-fields and pleasant courses of green turf. Forests, whose trees are already old have risen on other tracts : streams have silently worn fresh channels through the meadows ; and the old beds of tributary rivulets have turned to hollows filled with brambles and tossing, waving honeysuckles—with delicate harebells quivering on their edges, and their banks gleaming with the golden blossoms of the furze ; or laughing as their thousand blades and petals ripple in the summer air.

You must go back with us, against the stream of time, to the period of the Crusades. Do not fear that the epoch will be too by-gone for you to feel interested in the flirtations of those who lived in it. The passions of men were the same then as now : their outward costume and the usages of their social life were different ; but every chord of their hearts vibrated as with us at the present hour. The time, then, is that of the sixth Crusade against the infidel possessors of the Holy Land : and the scene passes at Chester, when the outlines of the tower of St. Werburgh rose, sharp and freshly chiselled, in the clear air—when the mailed knight and the man-at-arms came hither for accoutrements ; and the tramp of horses, and the blast of clarions echoed throughout the city and the wooded tracts surrounding it. The anvils of the armourers rang from morn until night, in their ceaseless labour to accomplish the fittings of the eager aspirants to glory in the East : and the state of the entire place, reversed the common order of improvement, having possibly somewhat degenerated from its comparative importance in the middle ages.

There were a great many pretty girls in Chester, then. There are faces to be seen there now equally fair : in less number though : and, moreover, they wear that sober sadness in the streets, which all nice-looking girls in Cathedral cities adopt—we never could make out why. But of all the fair ones who then lived within the walls, there was not one to compare with Margaret—the pearl, or daisy, or whatever other pretty synonyme you like to give her—the only child of Master Walter Lynnet, the Mayor.

It would have done you good for a long time, if you were ever so deeply in love, to have seen her. For she had such bright talking eyes, and such marvellous red pouting lips, that both together, they gave her face a come-kiss-me sort of an expression that quite drove the young men mad. But they would have been terribly taken to task had they attempted it. And she had, moreover, a white smooth forehead, and dark silkily braided hair ; with rounded ivory shoulders and small delicate hands : so that altogether you may readily understand that she had plenty of suitors ; and that more squabbles—not to say fights—took place about her, amongst the gallants of the town, than about any other disputed point of popular dissension.

But private affairs are as well known in the country to everybody else as they are to those whom they mostly concern; sometimes better. It was the same in the time of the Crusades as at present. And so the gossips of the city said that Margaret Lynnet cared more for young Hugh Lacy, the armourer, outside the gate, than any body within it; nay, they went so far as to declare that a jolly miller, who lived down the Dee, returning late one moonlight night, from a pottle carousal at the Bear and Ragged Staff, over against the Water Gate, to his vibrating tenement on the river: had seen Hugh and his lady on the walls with their faces certainly much closer together, just before he bade her good-night, than the brawling of the Dee rendered necessary for the mere purpose of hearing each other's voices. There was no post at the time, and so no kind friend of the Mayor sent him an anonymous letter to tell him this news: but Luke de Taney, the son of the Barons' Justice, heard of it, and as Master Lynnet had selected him for his son-in-law, he did not take much time in telling the Mayor all about it.

Margaret always thought that she did not like Luke de Taney much: and you would not have done so either, if you had seen him. He was short and awkward, with stubby light hair and a low forehead, and always appeared to be scowling at everybody. But his father was a potent man in Chester, and a brave one too—much braver than his son—for he had been besieged for two months without effect in the castle, during the baronial wars; he owned tin mines, too, in distant counties; and, as such, was an eligible relative. And, therefore, Master Lynnet told his daughter that if ever she dared to think of the armourer again—a worthless common fellow who spent all his time in thumping red-hot steel into swords and bascinets—he would put her for ever in a convent. And he was the man to keep his word.

Hugh Lacy, however, was not to be so lightly given up. For Margaret loved him deeply; and when a pretty girl loves a handsome young man deeply, it is either very delightful or very awkward, as circumstances may be. In her case it was the first. She loved his fine manly figure and good-tempered intelligence, and clever handiwork; for many of the productions of his hammer and anvil might have rivalled those of Benvenuto Cellini. But the Mayor of Chester had no taste for high art: as he often observed, the wrought steel of Hugh Lacy was nothing to the ready tin of Luke de Taney. He, therefore, settled the time of the marriage himself: and told Margaret that she must never stir from home without her maidens; and that when she did, on her peril, she was not to go beyond the city gates in any direction.

Young ladies had not much to amuse themselves with in those days, beyond embroidery, which was a pleasant excuse for doing nothing. It is curious how the custom has been preserved. So Margaret took to working a scarf, and used to go and sit, surrounded by her fair play-mates, on a pleasant green plot, shadowed by leafy waving trees at the foot of Pepur Street, as it was then called. And here, she was always gazing up over her work, through the gate; making such strange shots in the colours and sewing so many wrong needlefulls in all sorts of odd places, that the pattern became at last the wildest thing imagina-

ble. Sometimes she saw Hugh pass ; and then the young couple looked very tearfully and wistfully at one another, for they did not dare to speak. If they had, the Mayor would soon have heard of it, and the consequences would have been dreadful.

The wedding-day came very near ; and things got desperate with the lovers. In these times the bride did not make many purchases before her wedding. The wardrobes of young ladies about to marry were not then in that extremely destitute state which they appear to be in at present, when everything in the way of clothes, from top to toe—from little fly away caps to trim kid slippers—has to be purchased bran new. No ; she had only to sit amidst her maidens, and look pretty, and receive whatever her intended chose to send her ; or play at ball with them, for kisses ; which, as they were all girls together, and not even Luke de Taney was admitted to the game, was slow enough, even then. But they had little else to do ; for as few but the monks could read or write, it followed that there were not many circulating libraries ; and as nobody went to the sea-side, because when they did, the rude Welch people never let them come back again, but by the heaviest ransom, they had nothing but ball and tapestry to occupy their minds with.

Luke de Taney sent a great many presents, and was cruel enough to order Hugh Lacy to make a coffer of steel and brass and green velvet, for the bride. He did this to annoy the armourer, being perfectly aware of the attachment. It did not do to refuse the order, although Hugh set about it with a heavy heart at first : but, as he went on, it became apparently a labour of love to him. He was employed at it morning and night, and at last turned out a piece of work that would have shaken Wardour Street to its very foundation if ever it had appeared there. But it has long since rusted away.

Hugh was very particular as to the exact time when it was to be sent home, and he kept it to a minute, charging Luke de Taney a good round sum for it—half as much as an old curiosity dealer would have asked at the present day : no trifle, as you may imagine. The intended bridegroom examined it closely, inside and out, to see that Hugh had not locked up all his love and allegiance to go with it ; and then it was sent off to his betrothed.

Margaret was sitting alone, in her little room that day, listening to the Dee, and looking abroad on the beautiful scenery up the river, glittering in the afternoon sun, when the coffer came. It was placed before her, and as the messenger left, she thought still more of Hugh Lacy, and how much she loved him, and how soon the time would come when to think kindly of him would be a crime, until her heart was so very, very full, that if she had not burst into tears to have relieved it, it had well nigh broken. She cried a long time, until the sun went down, and the calm twilight, still blushing with its rays, stolé up, along with the stars, over the heaven. And then she would have sobbed herself fairly asleep, if she had not been suddenly startled by a whirring noise inside the box, like that which impetuous folks of the present time are familiar with when they over-wind their watches. The noise kept on, and next a false lid of the box flew open, and she saw a scrap of paper

lying beneath it. For Hugh had contrived and wound up a cunning piece of machinery, which he meant should go off just when there was a chance of Margaret being alone. It was a risk to be sure, and a very great one: but she was so watched, and all her maidens were so very proper, that he had no other way of communicating with her.

Margaret seized the paper, and with some difficulty read—no matter what: but it appeared very satisfactory. For her pale face flushed, and her fair bosom moved quickly, and her lips parted and almost smiled. One of two sobs, remnants of the old stock, rose every now and then: but even these soon stopped; and she went to bed and dreamed of Hugh Lacy.

The next afternoon she went with her maidens, as before, to the green-sward in Pepur Street, to play at ball: and Luke de Taney was half bewildered with joy, on being allowed to join the game, for the first time. He could not make it out at all, but of course conceived that the eyes of Margery were gradually opening to his merits. The old Mayor came down too, and sat under the trees to watch them. He would have had a pipe, only tobacco was at that time confined to an undiscovered world: so instead, he had a posset, and administered justice to all who came before him, very properly allowing wealth and power to weigh down the scale.

Margaret caught the ball, and threw it here and there, contriving to make Luke go after it into all sorts of uncomfortable places. At last, she said that she would throw it somewhere, and if her intended got it he should have a kiss from all her maidens—she was not jealous—not at all. But that if they got it first, then he must give them all a heart-cake to ransom it. They agreed, and she at once pitched the ball, very carefully, on to the top of the city walls.

There was a terrible scuffle at the old steps, by the side of the gate, after it: and Luke was quite smothered up by the veils and dresses of the pretty girls, as they all crowded up towards the top. At last they all got there; and the instant they were fairly on the ramparts, Margaret darted through the gate into the open country, where Hugh Lacy was waiting for her on a stout black horse. He caught her up in his arms and gave her such a kiss: and the Chronicles say it was returned, before Luke de Taney's own face! And then, shaking the heavy purse at him, which had been given in payment for the coffer, he struck spurs to his horse, galloped off along the right bank of the Dee, and was out of sight almost before any of the astounded gazers could have called upon Jack Robinson, had that person lived in the middle ages.

Where they went to, was not known for a long time. But Margaret had taken all her jewels, and Hugh had all his wealth buckled about him; so that their prospects were not so hopeless as those of runaway couples in general; and they settled down in a leafy inland county, as happy as it was possible to be; and a great deal happier than the King, who, one way and another, was badgered into having altogether a sorry time of it. And they never appeared again in Chester for four years; at the end of which time the armourer came back as Sir Hugh Lacy, with a title won by himself, in stalwart fight, and Lady Margaret—

"Margery" he would call her—so very beautiful that it was quite a treat to see her. In fact, the old acquaintances could not have kept their eyes from her fair face, if it had not been for the beautiful little three-year-old cherub who dragged her point lace into holes all day long trying to climb upon her knees.

Luke de Taney, as the Chronicles say, took to drinking, and becoming a graceless bird, was, one day, happily knocked on the head in the Welch wars.

But the Mayor ; he was a long time calming his anger. He was, however, resolved no other such elopement should ever happen ; for the very next day after the flight, he had the "Pepper Gate" shut up ; which was of little use then, for the mischief was done. And this gave origin to the Chester proverb, which the good citizens still use, of "when the daughter is stolen, shut the Pepper Gate ;" an adage, which by popularly varying the positions to that of a steed and a stable-door, is not unknown all over England.

As Mr. Howard concluded his story, before the applause had subsided, which even the taper kidded hands of the fair ones in the front row contributed to ; Dr. Aston was called hurriedly out of the Parthenon. He found a working man at the door, who begged that he would come directly over to the salt-works, about two miles off, where an accident had occurred.

"What is it?" asked the Doctor.

"A lump of rock has folded on a man, and hurt his lines terrible bad," was the answer. "We can't move him nohows to get him up the shaft."

"What, is he down the mine?"

"I reckon he is, and quite at bottom end of it. All the men are up ever so long."

"He's not alone, then," observed Doctor Aston. "Who is it?"

"Fletcher," replied the man ; "as lives by the brine-pit ; the one you put the child with, when he married, to be took care of. Little fellur's down wi' him."

"I'll come immediately," said the good apothecary ; "you start off ; and walk fast, or I shall be there before you."

The messenger turned away ; and the Doctor went back to the lecture-room, and stated that he was obliged to leave the company, but trusted to return before the meeting broke up. Mr. Buffles immediately proposed that the literary gentleman should take the chair, making the resolution in breathless haste, for fear Mr. Saunders should aspire to it himself. And then the Doctor hurried home, and ordered out his old sturdy galloway, upon which he proceeded to the scene of the catastrophe, leaving the diffusers and recipients of useful and entertaining knowledge to finish the business of the evening in the most rapid manner, consistent with the dignity of science, and the roast goose and lobsters that were said to await the committee, in the large room of the White Hart.

CHAPTER II.

MR. GUDGE REAPPEARS, IN THE PROUD POSITION OF BEING
ABLE TO DO THE PROPER THING.

It is a very great ~~thing~~ to travel. Otherwise, nobody would leave comfortable homes, and ~~their~~ own wash-hand-stands (there's comfort even in such things as these, especially when you know all the knots and dots of the fancy bamboo pattern ~~by~~ heart) for dreary lodgings and tough cubes of soap, that nothing ~~ever~~ dissolved but which pass on from traveller to traveller callous alike ~~to~~ water, hard as themselves: and towels like minutely embossed pasteboard—damp and half-washed as the napkins at a foreign eating-house, or ~~the~~ towels at a London swimming bath.

But travel expands the mind, as learned ~~works~~ observe: and teaches us that there are other interests at work—other ~~sympathies~~ in action—other mortals struggling, and striving, and passing ~~to~~ and fro in the world, besides those we are best acquainted with. And ~~in~~ proof of this, quite as great as the astonishment which novices fall into upon first landing on the continent, at hearing the small children speak French—a fact which it is incumbent upon every tourist to mention—is the surprise which tarry-at-home individuals are now seized with, when ~~they~~ wait at distant railway stations and find the same crowds always on the wing, on this large bustling human ant-heap of England.

The contracted existence in a country town—when you are compelled to stay there like the market-place, or the sign-posts, or, especially, the pump—is a sad padlock on the mind, keeping it in a terrible ring-fence. And, therefore, it is not to be wondered at, that on the day of the soirée at the Parthenon, the native inhabitants never conceived that London was almost as bustling and full of importance at that very time, as their own narrow ill-paved streets, which might be likened to twenty walls abreast with glass bottles on the tops of all of them: and that the dramas of business and intrigue were being sustained by people who had never even heard of the little town in question: and that, moreover, whilst all the carriages in the neighbourhood were seen in the street at once at the library, taking their tickets, there were still one or two in Hyde Park left to support the character of the afternoon drive.

Indeed on that particular afternoon, Hyde Park was very full: even to making a Londoner speculate upon where all the horses came from, and more particularly where so many were kept, as he looked upon the hundreds that cantered about the ride and the green sward. And on the other side of the river was the long procession of carriages, going round and round like the things on a clock-work picture, and always coming again in the same order, if you but waited to see them. The footpaths, too, were crowded with loungers against the wooden railings, who, if they did not keep carriages themselves, at all events thought it gratifying to know somebody who did, and receive a bow from the inmates.

There were all sorts of vehicles that afternoon in the Park. Heavy

old family coaches, with coachmen and horses to match, and the most wonderful old ladies inside, that ever were seen—equipages that crept out year after year with their panels re-varnished and their brass-work re-lacquered, slowly coming forth like the shoot of an old stump when the Spring was nigh, and disappearing when it was over, together with the old ladies: new Barouches, blazing with escutcheons like theatrical banners, and liveries almost like harlequins, just started by *parvenus* living on the borders of the exclusive world, and constantly fighting to pass its frontier: Mail-phaetons driven by men about town, who had gone round and round the Park for thirty years, and still clung to the peculiar hats, cravats, and general demeanour that distinguished them when they commenced their career, long before the bushy wig associated so badly with the thin, straggling whiskers, whose every hair was valued and its position known, upon the lined face. There were Broughams too, with the blinds half down, and small dogs looking out of the window; within which might be seen faces once fair, and still with sufficient beauty to attract attention, but knowing no medium of complexion between the pallor of a worn and wretched mind and the flaunting bloom of paint, slowly toiling round and round: as they had done yesterday: as they would do again to-morrow: without a recognition of the most distant acquaintance from any of the countless throng: except, may be, a covert nod from one or two young West End men who were leaning against the posts, more heart-weary of doing nothing, more lonely in that great mass of life, than any convict enjoying the united charms of hard labour and solitary confinement: and who whilst their looking-glass was obscured with cards and notes of invitation, three and four for the same night, did not know one house in all the world of town where they could drop in quietly, and unexpectedly, for an evening's simple chat, typified by the old-fashioned abolished "cup of tea."

In fine there were vehicles of every description from the highest to the lowest order: and amongst the latter may be classed a one-horse chaise which had stopped at the water's edge, where the carriages usually halt for the inmates to alight. It was a good down-right vulgar one-horse four-wheeled chaise, that ought never to have been imagined anywhere else but going over Hammersmith Bridge on a Sunday. And to strengthen its claims to plebeian distinction it had four people in it, the two behind appearing to revel in that excitement of frightful insecurity which is attendant upon that position in similar vehicles, from the chance of suddenly being left behind in the road. It did not look at its ease, at all, in the park. It was not at all a discontented chaise generally speaking, in matters of distance and load; but was altogether unused to such society. It appeared aware that large cotton umbrellas, turnpike roads, Montpelier Cottage or Polka Villas, brandy and water, leather gloves, and blue feathers, with a shilling for the ostler, were the associations inevitably called forth by its appearance.

In front, as driver, was seated an individual whom any one, who had once seen him, would have decidedly pronounced to be Mr. Gudge. Time had not altered his face in the slightest degree: but his appearance was if anything improved—as he himself conceived—by a bright blue

stock with long ends, which came out to great advantage against his beard and whiskers. Mrs. Gudge shared the front seat with him : and was a woman of imposing figure and elaborate bonnet, of the Landlady race with a cross of the Guildhall dowager. In past ages her likeness might have been seen on the race-courses, beneath the huge umbrellas, distributing the gifts of fortune that the dice ensured by telling her rotaries. "Two and three is seven, and five is fifteen, fifteen and five is twenty-three, and three is twenty-seven," finishing with a ruck of figures all at once, that the calculating boy himself could never have followed. She was in the habit of saying that she had made Mr. Gudge what he was ; physically judging, in an unbiassed spirit, she looked as if she could have made half-a-dozen of him.

The hinder seat was taken up by the nursery-maid and the olive Gudge : a charming infant of five years old ; who, but for the beard—which in this instance, however, was somewhat imitated on the infantile chin by the smear of some paint he had been sucking from a mechanical monkey, whose existence passed in tumbling backwards and forwards over the tops of two sticks, without any apparent intention beyond that of inconvenient exertion—would have looked like his father Daguerrotyped ; the constant scowl which overshadowed the features of the dear infant, favouring the resemblance to those cheerful works of nature and art ; or, in theatrical minds, he would have passed for the small "double" which walks along the mountains of the third entrance, to give an idea of great distance, before the appearance of the real character.

"Well, there's a comfort in mixing with the nobs, anyhow," said Mr. Gudge, "though you ain't one of 'em by birth. But what's birth ?—a mere chance ; no more to anybody's honour than it is to their disgrace."

Mrs. Gudge quite agreed with him ; and then, although the sun had gone in, opened a parasol that was in itself enough to knock anybody down who was at all feeble-minded, merely by their looking at it, and then assumed what she considered an attitude of aristocratic repose.

"Gudge," she said ; "who's them gals ?"

"Well, I don't quite know, Tootsy,"—it was a relic of their honeymoon, that "Tootsy," which Mrs. Gudge still liked to be called. "I've met 'em before though, I think at Sir F's."

"No, we havn't," replied Mrs Gudge, raising an eye-glass, which she used indiscriminately for reading small print close to her, or looking at anything two miles off. "No we havn't Gudge, it's no use ; you must buy a Peerage. For what's the use of coming here and knowing nobody ?"

Mrs. Gudge evidently considered the Peerage to be like Madame Tussaud's catalogue, which ticketed all the illustrious personages, so that you could know them in a minute. And had they all ridden in hack cabs, and never changed the numbers, this might have been an advantage.

"Ah—I'll see about it," said Mr. Gudge, with a there's-a-time-enough-for-that sort of an expression. "I'll see about it, Tootsy."

"No, you won't see about it, Gudge: you'll do it. For what's the use, as I say, of fighting up to get into the high circles, without a Peerage. And I'll be at Almack's yet, before I've done."

"There's Lord William," said Mr. Gudge, suddenly, as he lifted off his hat and bowed as rapidly and nervously as a race-course monkey when his keeper jerks out his salutes with a jack-chain. "How d'ye do, my Lord?—how—d'ye—eh? Why he must have seen me."

Mr. Gudge flushed until his face and whiskers were all one colour.

"I should have thought so," said Mrs. Gudge.

"Oh! he's not the man to cut anybody," returned her spouse; "not a bit of it. I was on his Election Committee—you recollect when; before Joey was born, and you were afraid baby would come into the world all purple and orange, from the bills and bows that covered the house."

Mrs. Gudge assumed the air of a young mother.

"Oh! he's a capital fellow. He used to slap me on the back and say, 'Gudge, my boy—Gudge, my boy,' he used to say, 'whenever you want a day's shooting, let me know, and damn it all, you shall have the run of five hundred acres.' There's no humbug in that you know; no, no; he's an out-and-outer. Oh, bless you, he never saw me; I know he's short-sighted."

And to prove his contented reliance upon that opinion, Mr. Gudge attempted to flick a fly from the horse's haunch in so savage a manner, that the animal jumped forward, and produced much undignified disarrangement in the attitudes of the occupiers of the four-wheeled chaise.

Poor Mr. Gudge! Sharp as he was—and he really would have been a fair match for the lowest lawyer in London, in cunning—he was not acute enough to understand that Lord William's eyes were like those of a snail, able to extend or contract their focus, and to accommodate themselves to circumstances in the most remarkable manner. He had not yet learned that the barest *entrée* gained into society above one's average station, in the eligible capacity of either a tool or a mountebank, is in itself a bar to inconvenient recognition; or that the man who went anywhere, however gratifying the introduction, where his wife would not be likely to be received, at all events with the same show of welcome as that which awaited him, by the female branches of the family—whose threshold he felt so greatly honoured in being permitted to cross—was only regarded, and ought to regard himself, as one of those talented gentlemen who can balance coachwheels, play clown to the ring, extemporize on the company at a night-tavern, or jump through a hoop at the command of the keeper, like other trained lions in various Zoological collections.

Considering Mr. Gudge was convinced that Lord William did not see him, it was astonishing how cross it made him. But the cloud was not of long continuance; Mrs. Gudge, having removed her eyeglass, was enabled to see pretty clearly, and the next minute exclaimed—

"Here's Sir F—— coming, in his phaeton: now, Gudge, mind he sees you."

Mr. Gudge revived at the name, and whipping his horse from the side of the water, came abreast of a dashing equipage that was slowly progressing in the line of carriages.

A handsome man, in the prime of life, was driving a low stylish open carriage, in which was a lady about thirty years old, dressed in the first style of prevailing mode, with a little boy, between eight and nine, whose gay cap, with a bright scarlet band, contrasted harshly with his pale face and lowering expression of countenance.

"How d'ye do, Sir Frederick?" said Mr. Gudge, with an accent on the last syllable, as their wheels almost grated together. "How dy'r do, my Lady? Pleasant day for a drive out, isn't it?"

"Well, Mr. Gudge," said the gentleman in return, as he bowed obliquely to Mrs. Gudge, whose parasol it appeared impossible to accommodate in any angle of light "are you quite well?"

"Hearty, as usual, Sir Frederick," replied the other. And he said "Sir Frederick" in a loud tone as some people whom he did not know, and the chances were, never would, passed. "The same to you, and many of 'em, and your good lady."

The lady alluded to looked at the gentleman on the box with an expression that said, as plainly as features could speak, "For Heaven's sake get rid of these people." But it was not so easily done; for as the champing bays of the patrician equipage moved on, Mr. Gudge whipped on his own horse too, and kept on the near side, at the risk of running all the nautically-disposed children into the river, who were swimming their top-heavy ships at the edge.

But intimate as Mr. Gudge appeared to be with Sir Frederick Arden—for such was the name of the Baronet—there did not appear to exist the same degree of cordiality between the ladies, who did not take the least notice of one another. For Lady Arden was entirely occupied in bowing to her friends who passed her, being on the proper off seat, with her face to the horses, for such interchange of courtesies; whilst Mrs. Gudge, after looking in vain for somebody she knew also, gave up the pursuit, and stared through her glass at nobody in particular, not choosing to appear unoccupied or neglected. And the man-child of the Gudge union sucked the mechanical monkey, as he stared heavily at the little boy in the other carriage.

"I met a friend of yours the other day, Sir Frederick," said Mr. Gudge, familiarly, after a short pause, during which the Baronet appeared to be fly-fishing with his whip, on the backs of the horses, and taking out knots where none existed, "Lord William Aubrey. He's in the Park to-day. I just said 'how d'ye do' to him. He's a capital chap!"

"Stop, Frederick," cried Lady Arden: "here are the Mainwarings coming. I want to see them."

The road was wider here, and Sir Frederick drew up out of the line, idling Mr. Gudge's four-wheeled chaise, felly-deep, into the Serpentine. But he did not go on.

There were three very handsome girls in the barouche that approached; and, after exchanging greetings, one of them spoke to Lady Arden:

"We received your invitations last night; and mamma intends to

reflected on the jets of steam that burst forth so angrily from their mighty bondage to mingle with the air, and fall damp and cold upon the earth around. Every chimney, every furnace was a land-mark for the Doctor, and he could have told some tale about it. From one the scaffolding had given way, at a fearful height, and the workmen had been dashed to shapeless lumps upon the ground. Here, the wheels had caught some wretched infant, who fed the joints with oil, in their clutch, and torn it limb from limb: and, at another point, the boiler had given way, and hurled the disjointed members of those who had overtaken its power high in the quivering and scalding air. And yet all this sacrifice was apparently needed—all these mighty fires were roaring, and huge wheels revolving, and beams heaving and straining—before so trifling a matter as a pinch of salt could be produced.

At length Dr. Aston arrived at the cottage of the miner who had met with the accident; and hanging up the galloway, he walked over to the works, which were close at hand, separated only by one of the large brine-pits. Nearly all the men had gone to rest; but one or two lights were glimmering in the sheds, and he found a few of the miners collected about the top of the shaft. This was a shifting platform, on which was a large tub, three or four feet across, fastened to a strong, flat chain, that went up into the obscurity at the top of the building. Huge blocks of rock salt were piled around, and pieces crunched upon the floor at every footstep, and every thing tangible was humid with saline damp.

"I shall want one or two of you down with me," said the Doctor, "we don't know what help we may require."

There was an instantaneous offer on the part of everybody assembled to accompany him.

"Not so fast, my friends," said Doctor Aston, as he glanced at the iron band; "how many will the chain carry?"

"We've come up six or seven, often," replied the man who had first fetched him. "But it's never been strained to its utmost. Let's see—here's eleven on 'em. Suppose we try what it will bear."

He said this as carelessly as if he had been about to test the strength of a trivet, or a hat-peg. And yet the shaft was three hundred and fifty feet in depth—a dark, dry well, piercing the earth nearly as deeply as the summit of our St. Paul's Cathedral rises above its surface!

"I think not," said the Doctor; "two will be sufficient. Come—any of you; but let us start."

He stepped into the tub, and one of the men stood opposite to him, having first put an inch of lighted candle into a small socket at the bottom. The third passenger then jumped on the edge, holding by the chain above, and the word was sent to the man who guided the steam-engine, in another room, to "let down."

The chain, which had been hanging in the tub, suddenly tightened, and the apparatus was lifted from the ground. The platform was then

removed, and the tub hung an instant over the mouth of the deep black shaft, and next began to descend.

The miners and the floor of the ware-room appeared to pass above their heads, and they were now going rapidly down, as they could perceive by the jutting edges of the rock which rapidly flew by them. They were sinking very fast; to a stranger it would have given that feeling of descending in a swing, when the stomach appears having all the laugh to itself, against the wish of its owner. Different strata were in turns left above them; sparkling chrystals, dull clay, gleaming stone, and next the chrystals again; and then they were half startled by the return tub, whirling up past them with a velocity similar to that which frightens feeble-minded old ladies when they sit on the off-side of the railway carriages, and meet another train.

Lower and lower yet! They must be going to the very centre of the earth—that region of red fire, and metallic tints, and wondrous imps, with huge heads and ears, and green foil cheeks, with curiously muffled voices for their size, and hair like dishevelled worsted comforters, which we have become acquainted with in the openings of pantomimes. And now they were half-way down. The noise of the machinery above was no longer audible in the depth; but had it broken they would still have been dashed to pieces against the rock at the bottom, with enough chain above them to crush them utterly when it fell. Yet it still kept giving out its powerful length, silently and surely, the only sound being the drip of the brine, as it fell from the points of rock and the draft of air carried it into the centre of the shaft. The opening above was still discernible from the lights about it, but it was not bigger than a shilling. In another half minute the tub touched the floor.

"Wut! mare!" cried one of the men, as he got out of their vehicle. "Dang'd if old Bess ain't here all by herself. She knows there's summut not as 't should be, and's come to shaft to tell us."

As he lifted the candle from the bottom of the tub, Doctor Aston saw a horse standing close to them. There were two in the mine; they had a regular stable cut out of the salt, and worked on a small railway, on which the blocks were brought up to the shaft. They went down young, secured in huge nets of massive rope, and never came up again but to be shot, or already as food for dogs.

"Whay—y—y, gal!" repeated the miner, as he stuck a little bit of lighted candle-end into the head-piece of the animal. "C'uck! Now then—come on! I reckon you know your way, or you wouldn't be here."

He struck the horse so sharply as he spoke, that Dr. Aston mildly reproved him. The miner was a savage-looking fellow, with matted hair, and an unshorn chin. The upper part of his body was singularly developed—in fact the muscles of his arms, which were bare, looked like ropes underneath his skin; but his legs were short, and his general stature stunted and compressed.

"Leave her alone, Rocky," said the other man; "she'll find her way fast enough; and if she don't, we knows it."

As he said this, he went to a small barrel on the ground at the corner of a buttress of chrystal, and took out some more pieces of candle, giving one of them to the Doctor. Meantime, the horse had gone forward by itself, and they saw the bit of light it carried twinkling like a star in the distance.

They marched on—the man called “Rockey” leading the way—through high arched passages, supported by square pillars of massive size, whose facets glittered in the reflection of the light they carried. It would have appeared to a new comer that he had arrived in the kingdom of sugar-candy, for such was the hue and form of the gigantic chrystal vault whose mazes they were threading. It was wonderful how the men knew their way; every pillar was like the last, and the rays of the candle could not reach far enough to light up other marks; whilst, whether the roof was ten or one hundred feet above their heads was a matter of perfect uncertainty. But they went on as though it had been a turnpike-road, until they came to the extreme working end of the mine, where the poor fellow who had been hurt was lying.

The way was not smooth here. They had to climb over large heaps of the rock, blasted down by the miners, so high that they could now touch the roof of the long vaults with their hands. Very difficult, too, was the journey: for the blocks rolled away beneath them; and each brought half-a-dozen more down upon the feet of those behind. But they scrambled on, and at last got to the object of their visit.

He was lying on the lumps of salt, almost insensible, with a few of the workmen's clothes thrown over him, as his head was supported by a fellow-labourer. By his side, and holding his clammy hand, was a little boy, nine or ten years old, whose features, intelligent and thoughtful for his age, bore an expression of wistful sorrow. His forehead was high and broad; his eyes were blue; and his head was covered with a profusion of light hair, which showered about it in curls evidently little cared for. His hands were unusually small. In spite of their being rough with work, and one or two of the fingers being tied up with rag from recent hurts, there was a remarkable appearance of delicacy about them. As he saw Doctor Aston approach, he looked up and smiled; but perceiving Rockey, who followed him, his face directly assumed a look of fear and mistrust, and he got nearer to the man who was hurt.

“I am afraid this is a bad case,” said the Doctor, after a slight examination of his patient; “he has injured his spine. How was it done?”

“That block came on him,” replied Rockey, pointing to an enormous mass of the salt. “We was obliged to move it with poles.”

Doctor Aston shook his head as he looked at it. The gesture was not lost upon the child, who exclaimed:

“But he isn't so bad as he was, though. Before you came down he was crying, because it hurt him so; but now he's quiet.”

"What, Christopher—my man!" said the Doctor, "how long have you been here with him?"

"Since seven this morning—loading the trams, and going backwards and forwards with 'em to the bottom of shaft."

"That's too long for you," replied the Doctor. "Do you like it?"

The little boy hesitated a minute before he replied. Then fixing his eye on Rocky, he faltered out, with some reluctance,

"Yes—I like it: pretty well."

"Oh, he likes it well enough, master; he likes it," said the miner, roughly. "Don't you, Christopher?"

As he spoke, he turned round to put down his candle. The boy flinched as he moved, and quickly put up his arm, as though he expected a blow, and was anxious to ward it off. Doctor Aston saw this, and said to the man,

"He appears to be afraid of you."

"Afraid of me!" returned the other. "Lor bless you, he loves me like anythink. Why, I was the one as brought him from Chester that night, and guv him his name when nobody knowd it. A little creeter he was, all head; and, says I, call him Tadpole, says I, and perhaps some day he'll turn to summut wonderful. Oh! he reglar loves me, and no mistake."

The tone of voice in which this speech was made, was certainly not a loveable one; the person of the speaker was still less so. And the expression of the child assuredly did not give any confirmation to the assertion the other was advancing.

"Well," said Doctor Aston, interrupting him, "we must see about getting this poor fellow up the shaft. I don't know that we can do better than putting him on one of the trams, and drawing him to the bottom of it. Suppose we try."

The two miners and the Doctor carefully lifted up the hurt man, who appeared paralysed by the injury, and with some difficulty placed him on one of the cars that ran on a small railway to the shaft. Then attaching the horse, and supporting their patient in a position which Doctor Aston pointed out as the best, they moved on.

The boy—Christopher, as we may now call him—was following with the others, when Rocky caught hold of his arm, and detained him.

"Stay a minute, Christopher," he said kindly; "we must get father's things, you know; and there can't be no more go up in the tub, not this time; and then—when Dr. Aston—has—got—"

He kept up the tone until the party were some yards off; then dropping it, as his countenance altogether changed, he added, fiercely:

"If you dares to move away from here, you young devil, I'll smaaash every bone you have with the rocks. I'm up to you.—Ur—r—r—r!"

He literally howled at the end of the speech, and grasped the child's arm so powerfully that he cried out.

"Now, none of that," he went on, cuffing him on the side of the head. "Father, as you calls him, is dead, leastwise, if he's not dead he's just as good; you won't see much more of him. Now what'll you do?"

"I shall run away—a great way off," answered the boy, sobbing.

"Oh! you'll run away: that's it, is it? I tell you what you'll do; you'll come with me, next week to the Yorkshire coal-pits; and there I'll make you hurry the corves, and be of some use. I'm not a going to stop here, you know."

The child burst into a loud fit of crying, as he said, through his tears:

"I won't—I won't go to the coal-pits. Harry Barker went, and slept on the shale, and eat the bits of candles he found, and at last died. I'll run away."

"Will you?" said Rockey; "that won't pay exactly. Now, there's some bread for you, and you'll stay down here to-night. It's safe enough, I'll be bound."

He pulled a small, hard loaf from his pocket, and threw it to the little boy, who, however, took no notice of it, so much had the intention of Rockey startled him.

"Don't leave me down here!" he almost shrieked, as he ran towards the miner, and caught hold of his rude clothes. "Pray—pray take me up with you. I'll go anywhere you like, and work in the coal-pits, but don't leave me here alone: so far underground."

"Leave go," said Rockey, fiercely, as he twisted the child's wrists with brutal violence. "You won't be alone. There's the horses, they're some company. You can sleep with them; you won't have above six or seven hours of it."

As Christopher pictured the long, dead time that must pass before the miners came down, he burst into a fresh fit of crying, and piteously intreated Rockey to take him up.

"No, no;" returned the miner; "you'd shirk off, I know you would; and I want you with me to be of some service, now Fletcher's done for. You may come with me to the bottom of the shaft. There—pick up that trace, and start off."

He pointed to a portion of some harness lying on the ground, and walked on. Christopher took up the trace, and followed him quickly, crying as he went, and running the risk each instant of singeing his curls, as he wiped his eyes, with the back of the hand that held his end of lighted candle. Rockey retraced his steps along the ground, and in ten minutes they were at the foot of the shaft.

"Now—put out that light," said the miner. "I'm not going to leave you here with the chance of setting the stables a-fire. It was done once; and nothing was found of the horses but some charcoal next day. You'd do it again, I know. You'll go to sleep better in the dark, and there'll be no daylight here to wake you."

He snatched the bit of wood that formed the candlestick from him as he spoke, and threw it far away. The boy again besought him in the most earnest manner to take him up; but the words were drowned in

the rough voice of the miner, as he shouted up the shaft to the man above to get ready. The answer that all was right was returned as distinctly as though the other had been but a few yards off; it might, however, well be so through such a mighty speaking-tube as the pit formed.

The huge chain trembled and rose a few links in height, sullenly clanking, as the engine above prepared for work. And then it stopped; whilst Rockey deliberately put his light in a socket at the bottom of the tub, and made ready to go up.

"There!" he said, when he had arranged it to his satisfaction, "that's for me. Now, you can't very well get away till I find you again," he continued to the boy, who came screaming to the edge of the tub, which was almost as high as himself. "Take your hands away. Leave go, I tell you. Oh—won't you?"

He doubled his fist, and hit the small hands of the boy as they clung to the tub with some force, for the blow was that which a sledge-hammer might have given. Christopher let go his hold, with a cry of pain, and Rockey gave a loud signal to "take up."

The chain rose again, and the tub was already some inches from the ground, when the boy, driven to desperation by the horror of being left underground, as a last hazard, caught up a piece of rock salt, and throwing it at the candle, overturned it; and it was directly extinguished. Then, in the darkness, taking the hook end of the trace, where it was attached to the trams, which he still carried over his shoulder, he hitched it on to the edge of the tub, and placed his small foot in the iron ring that connected it with the rest of the harness. This was done in an instant—in far less time than it has taken to describe the act—and he was now rapidly ascending the shaft, hanging to the trace, which was in its turn depending from the edge of the bucket.

In another breath they were at the top. The men had gone away with Doctor Aston and his charge; all except one, who was on the watch at the mouth of the shaft, and the solitary light belonging to him was flickering in its socket. The tub rose through the opening, and went some little way above it; so little, however, that when the platform shifted underneath, for it to descend again a foot or two, it nearly shut Christopher between its edge and the beams of the warehouse floor. As it was, the end of the trace was caught in the closing; but the boy remained above, and fortunately on the side opposite to the light.

The instant he touched the floor, he slipped his foot from the ring, and crept silently behind a pile of rock, heaped up in blocks ready to be carried by the barges to the evaporating works on the sleepy river a mile away. Here he remained, trembling, and scarcely daring to breathe until Rockey and the man left the warehouse, which they did almost immediately, when he saw that his escape was not suspected.

He would have willingly gone to the cottage of the miner who had been hurt, and whom he had always regarded as his father, but the

terrible agony of fear into which the threats of the other had thrown him, with respect to the collieries, could not be overcome; and he at once made up his mind to run away. Collecting all his little strength, he contrived to cross the canal that flowed directly below the warehouse, by pushing the unmoored end of a barge away from the bank until it touched the opposite side. And then he got into the open fields; and as the moon was now up, and the roadway clear, he ran on as fast as his young legs would carry him, crying, panting, and rejoicing that he had got away, until the tall chimneys with their flaming summits were left far in the distance behind him.

CHAPTER IV.

OF MR. GUDGE'S HOME, HIS CHAMBERS, AND HIS CLERK.

THE early rising goddess, whom those comical, but observant fellows, the poets, endow with rosy fingers—from the chilly state of the tips in the sharp, early air—had brought the chariot of the sun to the break of guage between night and noon; and having turned on the light prepared to make a day of it. In fact, to descend from high class writing, it was near ten o'clock A.M.; and Mr. Gudge was about to tear himself from the bosom of his affectionate family, and his love and cottage near Brompton.

It was morning, then, in London; and, just at this period, at Brompton as well; but the divisions of the day do not always run together in town and its suburbs. For, as we see in those ingenious diagrams which form the frontispieces to school geographies, and turn round on a knot, that when it is midnight at Botany Bay, the sun may be literally going like one o'clock at Greenwich; so it may be still morning in Grosvenor Square, when it is even after tea in Thistle Grove; or the hardy natives of Brompton Row may be gaily leaping from their French beds at the very time when the delicate children of Belgravia are falling into their first dream-laden slumbers within perfect houses of rustling brocade and French-polished mahogany.

Morning in London. Bed-room windows are open; door-steps are drying in patches; and fresh polished brass plates and bell-pulls make your eyes blink in their brightness. People walk with a business-like air, neither looking to the right nor left: and all appear hurried. Cabmen seem to think that lacquer is produced by friction, and rub the brass-work of their vehicles until the very metal disappears; and waiters in coffee-rooms have the air of country medical assistants, called up in the middle of the night. Cattle pervade the thoroughfares; and long barrows of flowers, still wet with country dew, are pushed along the road. Shopmen in shirt-sleeves are arranging their windows; boys in caps are playing fantasias on bits of slate to housemaids at the doors; and governesses, with rolls of music and Berlin

work reticules, are tripping about the pavements near the squares. The bank-bound omnibusses are crowded, and all with men; people hail them from the pavement, but to no effect; and expectant travellers look with despair at the five abreast outside, seen in the distance of the street, high over the cabs and waggons, as they emerge from the morning haze of a great city. By one of these vehicles did Mr. Gudge perform his usual journey to his chambers; and with its conductor did he every morning fight a desperate verbal combat, as that functionary would allow his passengers always to gaze down Sloane Street so much longer than was necessary to form a correct idea of its perspective.

Mr. Gudge's cottage—Coke Villa it was called—was a thing to look at, and would have repaid a walk out of the way, even over a gravelly soil, with thin boots on the wane. It was composed, by a cunning builder, of all sorts of bits of different orders of architecture, which had once belonged to large mansions; as people who have "a few friends in the evening," after a dinner party, spoon up the different broken moulds of cream and jelly into glasses, to form one festive dish. There was a porch that might have done for a Grecian temple, with vases on the top of the New Road street-dooric style, flanked by Gothic windows of stained glass around which shells were stuck, in cement, by way of making a border. Along the roof was a carved wooden gable, with a tall spike sticking up in the centre, like a lightning conductor, suggesting only one idea, similar to that prompted by the extinguisher steeple in Langham Place—what an awkward point it would be for a fat man to tumble upon out of a balloon. Right and left were two niches containing figures: the one of Shakspeare, and the other of a little brigand, gaily painted—one of those contrabandists who guard the sun-dried cheroots and Jem Crow pipes in cheap tobacconists' windows.

There was a lawn in front, with a grotto and a fountain, bordered by white flints and clinkers, and large shells. The fountain never worked well, from something wrong in its inside. It would at times play furiously for four or five hours in the middle of the night, and then stop for a week; and next, upon being started, go off all round horizontally, instead of up in the air, creating great confusion among the bystanders; so that it could not be altogether considered a hit. But, as Mrs. Gudge observed, "the nobs always thought a deal of fountains," and, therefore, the little leaden boy, who was constantly engaged in the hopeless task of endeavouring to blow a tune through a stone nightcap, with the tassel end to his mouth, was held in some reverence, and permitted to remain; chiefly, however, for the edification of two feeble-minded gold-fish, who went round and round after one another, in some dim water, gaping and staring as though they had been holiday visitors at the National Gallery, or British Museum.

"Tootsy," said Mr. Gudge to his much better half, in the breakfast room, whilst he tied a shawl round his neck before the looking-glass, "Tootsy, where's Sir F's note?"

And then he wriggled his head backwards and forwards as though he had been playing phantom pandean pipes, until his neck was arranged

to his satisfaction. He was one of those who think it absolutely incumbent upon anybody riding outside any vehicle to tie a shawl round their throat, even in the dog-days.

"Well, now—where can it be?" replied Mrs. Gudge as she dived her hand apparently down to the hem of her garment, under the surface; "I know it was here."

Upon which she fished up, and deposited on the table successively, some keys, a thimble, a bit of slate pencil, and half a biscuit, one glove, with the tips of the fingers cut off, a cheap linen-draper's circular, several mystic crumbs, and a rickety silver knife; at last producing the note—

"There!" she said; "I knew I had it. Wait till it's unscrambled, G."

And she bent it round the hot coffee-pot to flatten it.

"Give it me," said Mr. Gudge, sharply. "What's the use of huddling things like that in your pockets. T'isn't a bill."

"No, Gudge, it isn't, and there's nothing owing. I can walk out, proud and conscious—with not so much as a Bath brick to stare me in the face, and twit me—from one end of Brompton to any-where."

"That's it," continued Mr. Gudge, as he stuck the note right in the centre of the looking-glass. "There! people can see it now. 'Sir Frederick and Lady Arden request the honour'—the 'honour,' ah! all right—hoh! hoh!—'of Mr. and Mrs. Gudge's company on Thursday evening, the 19th inst. The Elms, Richmond.' I knew we should be there. And to think the time's come, eh?"

"Four days isn't a long notice, though," said Mrs. Gudge, "is it? Perhaps it is for the nobs, for they've always got lots of best things by them; all best things, I'll be bound. They won't beat my cherry satin, though," she added, half to herself.

"I've always told you," exclaimed Mr. Gudge, over his shawl, "to stick Sir F's cards and notes where people could see them; else, what's the good, eh? Answer me that—what's the good? Look here," he continued, as he read them off, "here's a set. 'E. Sergeant, Bonnet Cleaner.' Look at this, too; 'Gilbey—Marsala—24 shillings—capsuled brandy,' and all the rest of the nastiness. 'Ladies' wardrobes purchased'—'the natural parting so closely imitated'—why: you're mad to put these low things here!"

And he threw them, one by one, inside the fender, in company with a malformation of putty and perriwinkle shells which some marine artist of vivid conception, and great reliance on human credulity, had sold for a cat.

"Mind Tittums," cried Mrs. Gudge, as she picked up the curiosity accidentally swept off. She was very fond of it, for it had been bought at Margate, during that popular fallacy, the honey-moon.

"There!" said Mr. Gudge, heedless of the allusion to their young love; "that's how cards ought to be put. People always read them when they're in a room by themselves. I always do; it shows you

who they go with, and then you know what they are. Ullow! here's the buss."

As he spoke, the vehicle that usually called for him stopped at the gate. Tootsy caught up the olive Gudge, who was painting his face with an egg spoon, and presented him to his father to kiss, after the manner of affectionate pictures she had seen of 'The Departure' and 'The Return.' And then, having ascertained by the glass that her head-dress was sufficiently in order for the passengers to look at her, she nodded to the Gudge of her girlish affections until the omnibus rattled on to the corner of Michael's Grove, to take up the next traveller.

Mr. Gudge's chambers were in Clement's Inn, Strand, which is a legal hostelry with an exceedingly imposing entrance. Massive pillars, a bold arch, and a broad carriage-way, awe the visitor, at first sight, into feelings of respect for those who live within it. But at the entrance the spell is broken; like the dancing shows at the fairs, the outside is the best part of it; for you suddenly come upon a block of buildings, narrow courts, tall, gloomy houses, and noisome alleys, so very much at variance with the style of the portal that you cannot account for it. It appears as though London had been originally a great dissected puzzle, and that two wrong pieces had got together.

The interior of Clement's Inn may be described as the regions of compromise; not as applicable to the character of those who haunt its shuffling solitudes, but with respect to the place itself. For its first buildings, on passing through its iron gate, which gives you the idea of going into a cage, are compromises between lodging-houses and chambers. Its garden is a compromise between a London churchyard and Soho Square—which, next to that of Leicester, we hold to be the saddest of all metropolitan enclosures; and the very ornaments that adorn it are compromises between monumental urns and fancy flower-pots. The figure in the middle is the greatest compromise of all. The original artist evidently conceived a great idea, but got hazy in his mind as to the proper way of carrying it out; and so, vacillating feebly between a statue, a fountain, and a sun-dial, he affected a compromise between all three. As it is, the figure is typical of the intelligent negro, who crouching down in an attitude of supplication, whilst he balances a sun-dial on his head—in the infantile attitude of "hot pies"—implies that although he is a man and a brother, he is quite up to the time of day.

The northern straits, leading to Clement's Inn, are certainly less captivating than the Strand entrance. They are very difficult to arrive at at all from the great world, in the first place; and, in the second, the journey, when you have got there, is one of great enterprise, over apple and salad stalls, and through cabbage trucks, and between loins of mutton and unknown joints of beef, and under long barrows of fearful fruit. The footway is beset by snares of toasting-forks, stay-laces, and hollow, high-dried crabs; and avalanches of sprats, black dolls, and radishes, threaten the passenger at every step. But like another uncomfortable locality, which it is not at all proper to name in the vernacular, however practicable this entrance to Clement's Inn may be,

through all these difficulties even, the return is a matter of utter impossibility. You may arrive there by some secret corner of Lincoln's Inn Fields, but as to ever getting back again, that is quite another pair of shoes, or rather the wear of them. For if you escaped being torn to pieces by the savage men who traffic in raw flesh in the district, you would wander about the unknown regions which form the far back settlements of Drury Lane, until some friendly policeman took charge of you to the frontier, and left you there, with all the loins and briskets you had been compelled to buy during your voyage of discovery.

There is a court in the heart of Clement's Inn—the ventricle of its circulation—which we now wish to conduct the reader to. One end of it is entirely taken up by a large hall, with steps, and a door, and such a knocker! evidently intended for the use of some ogre residing there, who lives entirely upon broiled clients, garnished with fricasseed indentures. Christian, in the Pilgrim's Progress, and Mr. W. H. Payne in the pantomimes, are the only persons who ever had to do with similar knockers. Fortunately it is never used; if it were, one blow would be sufficient to shake down all the surrounding buildings like a thunder-bolt, and stun whoever fills the porter's chair within. High up in a house opposite this mighty engine, were Mr. Gudge's chambers; from this point, did he, spider-like—"cunning and fierce, mixture abhorred"—send forth his webs to attach themselves to distant points, and form the meshes in which his hapless clients got entangled, when he pounced down upon them from his lurking-place, and figuratively sucked their blood, until the drained body was cast by. We need scarcely say figuratively: for their blood was wasted, drop by drop, to scrape up the fees that Mr. Gudge pocketed; so that the vampire process was more literal than it might, at first sight, be conceived to be.

Here, high up then, he had his legal abode; and here did his clerk await him on the morning in question. The clerk was a very tall boy, who had pushed his legs and arms so far through his suit of clothes that how he ever got them off was a wonder. Perhaps he never tried to do so; a suspicion that might have been strengthened by the knowledge of his living altogether in Mr. Gudge's chambers, and the perfect absence of a bed therein; as well as by the apparently inextricable knots of string by which certain fresh ties had been formed where the old attachment of buttons had given way. He had never had but one suit since he was breeched, and they had not grown with his growth. The buttons had disappeared some time ago, wilfully, and from malice aforethought. The covered ones of the coat had long since spun away to inaccessible chinks and corners as teetotums; the metal ones had furnished all the top-strings their owner had need of for several years.

Nobody ever knew where Sprouts—that was his name—slept; it was believed that he did not know himself. For, as we have said, there was nothing like a bed in the two rickety rooms that formed Mr. Gudge's chambers: not even any social deception of a cabinet, or a sofa, or even an empty harpsichord, which we have known used occa-

sionally. But sleep there he certainly did ; and make his toilet, such as it was, as well. This latter operation must have been limited to washing his face, if ever he did so, in a pint pot, and drying it with blotting-paper ; whilst a quarter of a hundred of bank pens might have provided him with a comb and brush upon emergency. This, however, was never known for a certainty.

"Well," said Mr. Gudge, sharply, as he entered his chambers, with his blue bag, that morning, "who's been, eh?"

Sprouts had been endeavouring to play a popular tune on an instrument he had fashioned on the under-lid of his desk, of wire, tin tacks, and bits of tobacco-pipe. He slapped it down quickly as he heard his voice, and replied :

"Nobody, Sir, except Josh Skittler. He wouldn't wait, because there was nobody to watch his potatoes ; the boys plugged the steam-pipe, and burst the can the last time he left it. I wonder you didn't see him as you came in."

"What did he want?" asked Gudge, as he shut his hat in a deep drawer, turned up his cuffs, and combed his hair with his fingers into a greater peak than ever.

"He didn't say, Sir. I shouldn't wonder if it was money. He's taken so, sometimes. I told him it wasn't much of a go, I thought."

"You've no right to tell anybody anything, Sir," responded Mr. Gudge, wrathfully ; "except lies, when I order you," he added, after a moment's thought. "Go and serve this ; and if you see Skittler, send him to me."

Sprouts took an ominous-looking slip of paper from his master, and reaching down a remarkably irregular hat—that suggested the chance of its having been much worn by a tall man constantly going through low doorways—started off upon his mission.

He stopped, though, when he got to the entrance of St. Clement's Inn. It was at one of those perambulating kitchens which constantly steam at the tall portals, in company with every sort of cheap refreshment ; warning miserable clients that famine resulted from a visit within, and provisions were made against it in consequence. The can was kept by a person of a jolly aspect ; a young, sharp-looking fellow, with a brown gipsy face, and two small curls on each side of his forehead, as though his hair had grown into a large periwinkle shell, which had been taken away when it was properly trained to its twist. He had an apron on, and also wore a hatband—a hatband of ancient mourning, that had become a part and parcel of his attire, and, like ivy, now helped to support the ruin it had formerly clung to.

Sprouts looked upon the can of Mr. Skittler as a species of club, or tavern, where, at certain times of the day, his acquaintances were wont to congregate. But it had great advantages over a club or tavern ; you might have breakfasts up to midnight if you pleased, or suppers at six o'clock in the morning ; the food was served the instant it was ordered ; and no entrance or ballot was required.

There were two or three individuals loitering around the can when

Sprouts went up to it. Some, who had money, were eating; others, who had not, watched those who were; and, with their hands in their pockets, whistled vague melodies, and performed dances to match on the kerb, in the style of North American Indians learning to rub their shoes.

"Now, Josh," said Sprouts, "give us a good 'un; and then the governor wants you. I owe you for the last: there's a penny—ah, that nubbley one's the boy!"

"That potater's a picture!" observed Skittler, admiringly, as he exhibited it.

"I'm glad it isn't," replied Sprouts. "Now don't, Josh—not too much of that butter. I can't stand it: upon my soul I can't; and you know I'm not particular. Excuse me: I have seen them put something into the wheels of railways. Never mind—we know."

There was a laugh from the bystanders, and they looked at Sprouts with much admiration; more especially as he made a comic grimace of dislike, and gave a general confidential wink to all around.

"Ah," said the purveyor, "it's all very well, but that's the only thing to fill you out. If I was you, Mr. Sprouts, I wouldn't live on parchment shavings and red wafers no longer: it don't agree with you—take my word for it, it don't. If you can't get wholesome taters always, try foolscap: you really wants nourishing victuals—you do."

The laugh was turned directly; and Sprouts was sorry he had spoken. He was evidently looked upon as a miserable pretender.

There is nothing a mob—be it large or small—likes so much, as the setting up of an idol to throw stones at the next minute. And herein, by the way, does the object of their admiration resemble a snow man, which begins from a mere handful, and little by little, with much persevering toil, in which every body has a part, is rolled into a great, imposing mass, which they raise the higher, with cheers and acclamation, in proportion as they anticipate the pleasure and excitement to be the greater in eventually knocking it over. Nor if they omit to do this is its ultimate fate more brilliant: since it thaws away, uncared for, as its leading features become weaker and more indistinct. And then they say, "Ah, it is nothing like what it was." Familiarity to the eye, however, may have something to do with this. A man sees Niagara for the first time, and shouts with rapture, or is speechless with admiration. The next day he thinks it simply a very fine fall. The next week it does not appear to tumble half so grandly as it did: and he wishes the water would come down in another fashion. Unless, like a firework, it alters its effects every minute, he wearies of it. And yet it is as grand as ever;—the same volume is pouring forth,—the same iris of brilliant light encompasses it,—it sparkles and flashes as of old. But he measures the sensation only by the first effect it produced; and unless it can, in itself, exceed this by some new and utter convulsion of its nature, it is no more worth regarding.



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"Go on," said Sprouts, as he broke his steaming breakfast in half. "It's the only thing I can afford—being laughed at: so it's a sort of independent comfort. I owe you one," he added, to Mr. Josh Skittler.

"Then I'm safe enough never to get it, whatever it is," replied the merchant, with an antagonist wink. "You musn't try your wits against mine, yet, tall-boy. I sharpens 'em every morning before I set out, on a patent hone—a regular rasper, what was made three miles under-ground, by a man who never came up but once a quarter, and then only to see what a clock it was."

Encouraged by this attack, a small newspaper-boy in the crowd who had come from an adjoining stall, where he had been eating a saucerfull of strange shell-fish, peppered with dust, called out, in allusion to the stature of the tall clerk:

"I say, Poplar, is it a goin' to rain?—you'll see it coming before we shall."

Sprouts seized the cap of the urchin, and pitched it on to the top of a Blackwall omnibus that was passing. The aggressor started off after it; but his companions had the cue, and followed it up.

"Who rode the elliphunt at the Logical Gardens, and couldn't keep his legs off the ground," shouted another: an imp in a paper cap, bound with proofs to the lodgings of an author, who wrote funny things under difficulties; being obliged to be comic to measure, whenever the devil called to tell him more was wanted.

"He don't hear you: he's too high up," said the keeper of an opposition stall, who had no fear of offending a customer before his eyes, but wished to take what was now the popular side of the question. "Get on the lamp-post, and then you can talk to him."

This was too much. There appeared to be preparations for a triumphant dance around the object of their amusement, so Mr. Sprouts, telling the other again that he was wanted directly, rushed off to devour his breakfast at ease, and combine nourishment with literature before the periodical shops in Holywell Street. For serving a writ was, in the hands of Master Sprouts, a process of remarkable intricacy. It comprised a quarter of an hour's light reading at a book-stall; an attendance of the same time at the drama of Mr. Punch; several contests with indomitable boys who addressed him, without the etiquette of an introduction, on points of personal appearance; an inspection of whatever troops were on parade, and a subsequent twenty minutes with nature and the ducks in the Green Park enclosure; a prominent partizanship in any street uproar that fell in his way; an inquiry into the manufacture of corks, cheap paper-hangings, evening journals, cottage loaves, and ground coffee—in fact, everything that could be seen for nothing through windows and down areas; and, lastly, the main object of the excursion, for which he was usually too late, to the great advantage of the intended victim.

As Sprouts left, Mr. Skittler lifted up his kitchen, and bent his steps towards Mr. Gudge's chambers. On ringing the bell, the

attorney first peered up through the letter-box, to see who it was, and then admitted him.

"Oh, you're here, are you?" observed Mr. Gudge, as he walked back to his desk, leaving Josh to shut the door.

"I believe so," said Skittler, who did not appear much abashed; "at least, if I'm not, I don't know where else I am just at present; do you?"

"Don't be too sharp," replied Mr. Gudge; "you're not with your pot-house pals now; so remember."

"I an't very likely to forget it," replied Skittler, looking round at the dry books, mouldy furniture, and general anti-convivial appearance of the chambers. "You needn't be afraid of any mistake," and he turned his attention to his can.

"Pish!" said Mr. Gudge; "now be good enough to attend, and leave those potatoes alone for a minute. We needn't mince matters—I never do, it's not my plan. Skittler, you know all the blackguards in London, eh?"

"I can't say my connexion's small in that line, anyhow; I certainly do know a few—of all sorts."

And he fixed his eye keenly upon Gudge as he spoke.

"There's a trifle to be earned without much trouble," continued the other, "if you feel inclined. You can keep a thing dark, eh?"

"Pitch."

"Certain, eh?"

"Dead."

"Look here, then," said Mr. Gudge, drawing a letter from a bundle on his desk, and carefully folding it back as he looked over it. "I want you to make inquiries amongst the lodging-houses, and especially those down by the river, if a boy about ten has come up to London by any of the ships—most likely a collier—within the last fortnight, in the care of a rough-looking fellow from the mines, or followed by him."

"Is that all?"

"No, it isn't. If you should see one or the other, watch them. Keep your eyes open—have all their movements so," and he pressed his crooked blunt-nailed thumb firmly on the table; "but don't let either of them know it: only tell me. Dy'e see? eh?"

"All right," answered Mr. Skittler. "But—you'll excuse me—what's the terms?"

"I think you'd better leave them to me," said Mr. Gudge.

"I think not," answered Josh; "if it's all the same. Lawyers are so long paying. They're not used to it, you see; it's the other side the question, they're best up in; and whatever I asked, you'd tax it. It must be money down."

"But you know me," Skittler, said Mr. Gudge, mildly.

"That's just it—I do," returned the other gravely.

"And you can trust to my generosity,—I'm sure you can. You know I never forget a kindness."

Mr. Skittler depressed his lower eyelid with his finger, as he replied, staring at the lawyer,

"You don't see the Post Office there, do you? nor Hyde Park? nor perhaps you can't make out Temple Bar very well? I'm not quite blind, yet, am I? I can shy over the winker still, can't I?"

Mr. Gudge at first looked very black, and then turned all over uncommonly red, as though his anger had been hot enough to boil him, like a lobster.

"Do you know you're in a gentleman's room?" he said, wildly.

"Can't say I did till now," replied Josh. "Have you borrowed the use of it, then?"

"Pshaw! we must stop this nonsense, Skittler," answered Mr. Gudge, with an effort, after a minute's pause. "Let us meet as men of the world, and waive distinctions."

"Oh, I'm agreeable; there's no pride in me. As men of the world, then, what are you going to stand?"

Mr. Gudge slowly put his hand in his pocket, and pulled out a dirty, little red canvass bag, tied in a knot. He opened it, and then did not shoot out the contents into his hand, or on to the desk, or place it entirely at the disposal of Skittler, as a wealthy person would have acted with a purse in a melodrama; but he stretched out the mouth with his fingers, and peered into it sideways, as a bird would have done.

"There!" he said, at length, fishing up a coin, after a violent debate in his mind, as to the amount; "there's a sovereign. Yes, it's all right, you needn't worry yourself. Now be off; and don't come back again until you can tell me something; eh?"

"Leave it to me," answered Josh, as he spun the coin in the air, and, after the performance of another ceremony, put it in his pocket. He took up his can to leave, when, suddenly turning back, he added:

"I say, Sir—"

"Well, what do you want now?" inquired Mr. Gudge.

"There's no blood-money about this, I hope; it won't get anybody into trouble? No—eh?"

He accompanied the last words by dropping his head on one side, and holding up his hand over his neck, as though he suspended himself from it; finally uttering a sound similar to that used to excite lazy horses, which the ignorant ostler is reported to have beaten his child for not being able to spell, when he came home for his first holidays.

"No, no," replied Mr. Gudge, testily; "not a farthing—not a shade. But if there was, what then?"

"Why you might do it yourself," was the answer. "As the young woman said in the play, the other night, 'the man that'—let's see, what did the man do?—'the man that'—I'm the worst hand at recollecting those things."

"Never mind—never mind," said Mr. Gudge with impatience.

"It was capital good, though; went right through you like a brick-bat," observed Josh. "'The man that may not marry his grandmother'—no, that wasn't it. I wish I could remember it."

"Don't trouble yourself," said Gudge: "it's all right. I give you my word."

"If you really give it, it's safe not to be worth much," rejoined Skittler; "however, there's no offence. Will you have a tater? There's a perfect model," he exclaimed fondly, producing one he had been diving after; "worth any money to paint. Take it, now."

"I never eat them," answered Gudge, shortly. "Thank'ee, though, the same; good morning."

"The loss is yourn," replied Skittler. "Well, I'll leave it there for Sprouts; it will help fill up some of his corners. He sadly wants grouting, as the bricklayers say. He'll blow down some day, when he's out in the wind, if you don't mind."

And, having delivered himself of this opinion, he put the smoking vegetable on the mantelpiece, and once more took up his can and went away, leaving Mr. Gudge arranging his various papers, as anglers lay out their trollers, and ledgers, and paternosters, preparatory to a day's fishing.

CHAPTER V.

THE FÊTE AT SIR FREDERICK ARDEN'S—ALL SORTS OF WHEELS.

AT half-past five, on the afternoon of the above-mentioned day, Mr. Gudge having followed the sun on the top of a Brompton omnibus, arrived once more at the door of Coke Villa; and descended without danger to himself, or his blue bag, or, more especially to the olive Gudge, who, the moment the gate was opened, rushed madly out under the hoofs of the horses, and was only taken back again by the most extraordinary physical exertions of the maid.

"There!" said Mr. Gudge, as he entered his parlour, and put the bag on the table; "there! I've got everything all right for to-night. What do you think of those?"

This question was addressed to his wife, as he drew forth a pair of short glazed boots from the bag.

"Very handsome, G."

"They ought to be; twelve and sixpence; but they're quite the go; and it all pays, you know, in the long run, especially at Sir F's. That's rich, too, isn't it?" he continued, pulling out a bright blue stock, worked with floss silk sunflowers.

There is something very remarkable, and hitherto unexplained, in the affection of men with red hair for blue cravats.

"I think we shall take the shine out of some of them, Tootsy; make the nobs stare a little to-night, eh?"

"Wait till you see my cherry satin," replied Mrs. Gudge; "and I've got the loveliest wreath—red poppies and ivy leaves, with gold hops. Ah! drat that child; he's burying his doll again in the coal-scuttle. Joey, put that lump down, Sir. How dare you?"

The olive was immediately chastised, and a howl was the consequence.

"Where is Sarah?" asked Mr. Gudge, angrily ringing the bell. "What a thing it is, when people are paid, you cannot enjoy a moment's peace. No—no answer; of course not. Don't make such a noise!—Oo—o—o!"

The last words were addressed to the olive with a violence that awed him into silence.

"Oh! you've come at last, have you?" he continued to the servant, who now appeared. "Why didn't you attend to the bell?"

"Please, Sir—"

"But I don't please. Now—what then?"

Sarah appeared at a loss for a suitable reply, as she stood turning round the door-handle, and looking uncomfortable.

"You're all alike—an idle, good-for-nothing, ungrateful lot. Glad enough to come, and then you get fed up, and insolent, instead of grateful."

"I can't be everywhere at once," murmured the maid.

"Now, don't be impertinent. Yes, you can, if you choose. Perhaps you'd like your mistress and me to wait upon you, eh? Perhaps you'll take a chair, eh? Perhaps we'd better go down and cook the dinner. Well, I'm sure; what will you have next?"

This was difficult to answer, inasmuch as no desire had been implied by the handmaiden.

"Oh! she's an artful hussey enough when she chooses," chimed in Mrs. Gudge. "There, don't garm that door. Take Master Joshua down stairs with you; iron out the bits of things I gave you, and mind the beef don't bile too fast; it must be nearly done enough. I'll lay the cloth for once."

The servant, after another gymnastic contest with the olive, retired; and Mrs. Gudge began to clear the table as though she had been used to it all her life.

The villa of Sir Frederick Arden, where the night fête was to take place, for the invitation to which Mr. Gudge had managed so successfully, was situated on the side of the Thames below Richmond; a long, cottage residence, fronted by a smooth, springy lawn, that sloped to the water's edge; and half washed by the graceful foliage of some drooping willows, the ends of which quivered always in the tide that rippled amongst them. Dark, fragrant cedars broke the light upon the close turf, shading the rustic seats beneath their low flat branches, and throwing out the bright petals of the geraniums and fuschias that were glowing in the sun beyond in the large baskets of fir-bark, or iron-

work. Delicate creeping plants—the *canariensis*, the clematis, and the convolvulus—appeared to support the light verandah, ere they bordered the upper windows, for the villa was only one story high. Festoons of vines and clusters of twisting hops, stretched from tree to tree over the walks; and from one of the wings a gothic conservatory extended, sheltering the rarest scent-laden plants, in the midst of which a fountain rose, like a dome of water, plashing musically as it fell back into the basin of shells and coral, within which a few pale water-lilies were floating. The interior of the house was fitted up in the most exquisite taste; nothing was obtrusively prominent, and yet nothing could have been added to improve the graceful effect of the whole.

In the same uniform spirit of elegance had the arrangements for the intended fête been made. The services of Edgington—who, like Aladdin, can raise a palace, or remove it, in a night—were called in towards the accommodation of the crowds expected; and a gorgeous saloon, of arabesque panels, and pink and white draperies, rose on the lawn; for the rooms of the villa were comparatively small.

Gunter's men knew no rest, but went backwards and forwards perpetually with mysterious trays, and covers, and boxes: Weippert superintended himself the construction of the orchestra. Every point on which the eye could be expected to rest had some subject for its admiration to dwell upon. And when night came, and the thousand lamps twinkled from the trees and flowers, or trembled, by reflection, in the river, from the illuminated boats moored in the stream opposite; when that delicious *ensemble* of transparent gleaming windows, faint sounds of waltzes from a well-conducted band, fresh odours of flowers, rustling dresses, bright eyes, perfumed tresses, and white shoulders, was perfected, the effect was almost bewildering. It equalled the most gorgeous scenes of Eastern festivities ever described; with all their orange and citron thickets, and flaming tapers, and Persian girls, and marble stairs, and nightingales, and diamond-studded rivers that held their mirror to the stars.

It was long since the road leading to the villa had been in the state of turmoil that disturbed it on the evening in question. For vehicles of all descriptions, from the London chariot and the heavy county family carriage, to the provincial fly of the neighbouring petty gentilities, kept unceasingly arriving, even from the very first moment specified on the note. In fact, Sir Frederick and Lady Arden were scarcely ready to receive their guests when the first carriage drew up at the door. And from that moment the sound of the falling steps was never hushed.

The country folks came first. It is the habitude of some always to do so; for their imagination is literal, and they believe that the nine o'clock of the invitation means an hour after eight, and so they start betimes. Richmond itself sent its undeniable gentry—good people who look as if they lived on Maids of Honour always, so courtly is their bearing. Hampton Court turned out its dowagers, in the brocade of other days, around which the cardinal spiders of the palace might have

spun their webs for years ; Mortlake and Barnes provided some oscillating respectability, that a breath might have inclined to the patrician or parvenu rank ; Twickenham came out strong in Tritons amongst the neighbouring minnows ; Kingston sent substance ; and Sunbury, beauty ; and Kew, staid propriety ; so that altogether there was a good melange. As for the Londoners, they comprised all the names we meet with everywhere during the season ; and, besides these, the officers spun over from Hounslow in gigs and dog-carts, and were exceedingly useful, as well as ornamental, if it was only to show the provincial cavaliers how to go the pace.

The arrivals were at their height, and the hall was filled with company on their way, when, as a newspaper would say, considerable excitement was caused in the neighbourhood of the gates by the approach of a four-wheeled chaise, which cut in before a post-chariot, and stopped at the door ; nothing of its inmates being visible for an immense umbrella rising from the front seat.

"Halloo ! waiter ! anybody !" cried a voice ; "come here, some of you."

But nobody appeared much inclined to move.

"I say, you Sir," repeated the voice to the very pompous butler, who was just inside the door, "where can the horse go, eh ?"

"I think you must have made a mistake in the house, my good man," replied the butler. "This isn't an inn."

"Who the devil do you call a good man !" exclaimed the other. "Don't good man me. Whose house is this, then ?"

"Sir Frederick Arden's, Baronet," answered the grave retainer.

"Well, that's where I'm asked ! I'll trim all your flunkey's jackets for you, you rascals."

"Impudent jackanapeses !" chimed in a female voice.

"Go and tell Sir F. that I'm come—Mr. Gudge—he'll know me ; and there's nobody to take the horse. Here, Tootsy, you get out."

"Now then !" cried the post-boy of the chariot behind, not exactly comprehending the scene. "Go on with that cockney-hutch."

This was too much ; the umbrella was suddenly closed, discovering Mrs. Gudge, in full dress, with an enormous calash over her head, of a shot cabbage colour, (pickled and green), and Mr. Gudge in his own ball costume, who turned round with a whisk, and shouted in accents of fearful excitement :

"If you move an inch your pole will be through my back boot, and I'll pull you up for it as sure as your name's—damn your name ! I don't care what it is ; only look out—that's all. Now mind—I warn you before witnesses."

"There's no place nearer than the inn," said the butler, thinking he had better say something, and not knowing exactly who the strange visitor might be.

"Oh yes—the inn—I should think so," said Mr. Gudge. "Fancy coming back half-a-mile over that gravel, and with these new boots. There—look at them—satisfy yourself."

He put his foot out in the light of the lamp as he spoke, and was exhibiting it to the butler, when Mrs. Gudge seized his arm, and exclaimed:

"There's Sir F.; I see him—in the all."

"Ha! Sir Frederick! Sir Frederick!" cried Mr. Gudge, as soon as he perceived the Baronet. "Here—half a minute. I'm sorry to trouble you."

The Baronet was passing with a lady from the drawing-room to the conservatory. He started as the tones of Mr. Gudge's voice reached him; but directly recognizing them, he hurriedly found a seat for his companion, frowned, and bit his lip until the blood almost started from it; and then, directly assuming a smiling face, came to the door.

"So, Mr. Gudge, you've got here at last, I see," he said.

"Yes, Sir Frederick; all right—right as twenty trivets and nine-pence on the top of 'em. But there wouldn't have been a chance of getting much further, if I hadn't caught you. What am I to do with my horse?"

"Well, I really don't know, Mr. Gudge. I am afraid we cannot accommodate you; and, you see, my servants are occupied."

"Ah," said Mr. Gudge; "so they are. There's not so many at leisure to help as the night we set off from Chester; is there, Sir Frederick?"

"Binns," exclaimed the Baronet, hastily, "let Davis take the horse round."

"How dy'e do, Sir Frederick," exclaimed Mr. Gudge as he entered the hall; "all right, eh?" putting out his large hand to the Baronet.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Gudge," replied the host, extending the tips of his fingers. And then he added: "Excuse me half a minute. I shall see you presently."

And as the man came forward to the horse's head, Mr. and Mrs. Gudge alighted, and allowed the string of carriages that had collected behind them to come on.

"Well," said Mrs. Gudge, "what's to be done now? There's no young woman to take anything. Where's my calash to go, Gudge? And that umbrella ought never to be left in the pheaton a night like this."

"Bother!" was the reply. For Mr. Gudge was evidently annoyed, and when he was so, his temper kept its heat as long as a jam tart.

"Bother!" he replied. "Here, shove it under the billiard table; nobody will hurt it there. Stop a bit; wait till I've got my glove on. Ah, there it goes; that comes of your eighteenpennys. Never mind, I'll hold it in my hand."

And then, having used his handkerchief, with a noise like an opheiclide, and brushed up his hair, he was announced, and entered the drawing-room.

Lady Arden was talking to some of her visitors—one or two that she particularly looked up to; and would rather that every one else in the world but these had seen the arrival of the Gudges. But there was no help for this; so she bowed, very distantly, and then went on with her conversation. But Mr. Gudge was not so easily shaken off.



1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee who have been appointed to study the problem of the distribution of the public lands in the State of California.

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"Uncommon pretty, to be sure, my Lady," he exclaimed, as he gazed about him; "quite bangs Vauxhall, as the saying is. And no shilling plates of ham, I'll be bound. No, no; we all know Sir F. does the right thing when he does do it, eh?"

Mr. Gudge finished with a pleasant laugh, in which nobody joined. Poor Lady Arden would have rejoiced at an earthquake, and was ready to faint; whilst Mrs. Gudge was fanning herself violently, from mingled heat and indignation at the suspicion that she was not paid all the respect that her cherry-satin entitled her to.

Fortunately there was a little diversion to the position of things, as the company thronged round the piano, where John Parry was going to sing. Mr. Gudge immediately elbowed his way through them, and dragging his wife after him, got close to the instrument, which the talented *buffo* was turning into a more singular speaking machine than any others ever invented.

"Good again!" said Mr. Gudge, as he rapped the sounding-board when any clever effect came out; and then looked round on the company, that they might coincide with his approbation.

"First rate, Tootsy, isn't it, and no mistake?"

"Umph!" said Mrs. Gudge. "There wasn't a soul asked me so much as to have a cup of tea. Call that breeding?—I never see such breeding! Pah!"

She was evidently not in a state of mind to enjoy anything. Meanwhile, the song concluded, and a low murmur of applause ran round the circle, which was interrupted by Mr. Gudge's warmth of commendation. Clapping his ungloved hands together, he cried out.

"Bravo! Parry! Oncore! oncore! He always sings another, you know,—Oncore! If I might presume, you don't happen to know 'When we went out a shooting,' do you?"

John Parry smiled, and shook his head; he regretted his *repertoire* was deficient as respected the wished-for song.

"Ah! it's a capital good one," said Mr. Gudge; "just the thing for you, with all your hankey-pankey work on the music: you should get it."

"Come, Parry," observed Sir Frederick, coming to the rescue, and seizing him by the arm: "you must take some refreshment after that. I've sent a cool bottle of claret into the kiosk. I think Lady Arden is there, and one or two nice persons I wish you to know."

They went out by the French window to an elegant little Turkish tent on the lawn, in which eight or ten of the visitors had assembled, closely followed by Mr. and Mrs. Gudge, who did not feel at all at their ease, and, like people in that predicament, hung on to those they knew like leeches.

"Let's see how Parry drinks wine," said Mr. Gudge, staring, as he advanced still closer; "I'll be bound it's some fun."

"I wish I had some," observed Mrs. Gudge, "if it was only Marsaly; I've not tasted anything for hours."

"Hist! Tootsy," whispered her husband. "Look—now he's going

to drink. Oh, hang it; he didn't do anything comic, after all; we might as well have seen anybody else. I thought he'd make such a face!"

But, to Mr. Gudge's disappointment, John Parry simply swallowed his wine as any other gentleman would have done. In the mean time, his partner had made a discovery. Turning to a young lady who was conversing with Lady Arden at the entrance of the tent, she said,

"I think I've seen your face somewhere before, Miss."

"Possibly you have," answered the young lady, politely.

"Or, if I haven't, you're very like a party I know; but I'm sure I've met you. Do you know Mrs. Hicks, at Old Brompton?"

The young lady had not the honour of the acquaintance.

"Ah, then it couldn't have been there," said Mrs. Gudge; "but I'm sure I've seen you—somewheres."

The young lady smiled at Lady Arden, who rose, and crossed to her husband.

"I say," whispered Gudge, "Tootsy; I know her; it's Miss Dolby. Can't she sing a few! Let's ask her."

"Sure enough, so it is! Curious, isn't it, Gudge, to be close to all these wonderful people?" said the lady. "Suppose you do."

The chances are he would have done so, had not Lady Arden said hurriedly to Sir Frederick,

"Do take those dreadful people somewhere else, Frederick, for goodness' sake! What could induce you to ask them?"

"We will not argue that question now," replied the Baronet, pettishly; "I will see what I can do."

Taking a matter of fact view of the subject, it is certainly remarkable that people are still found who give parties, apart from any particularly interested feeling, but merely for the sake of giving them, and receiving their friends. It is pleasant at the same time to think that there is some unselfish liberality still floating about in the world; for, what with the first doubts of who ought to be invited, and who should not, and difficulty of balancing the two grand battalions of pretty girls and eligible men—without due attention to which great point a *réunion* will always flag—what with the argus eyesight required in one head, that nobody may be neglected, nor any hitch occur in the complicated mechanism of the evening—none who merely looked forward to entertaining themselves would ever think about receiving their acquaintances; for they simply become the frogs, pelted and scared for the amusement of others.

The position is the same, from the patrician hostess, who scarcely has the trouble of ordering the component features to be got ready, to the mistress of the middle life establishment, around whom the evil spirits of negus and sufficient fowls dance in bewildering doubt from a week before the evening until the last guest has gone. And the "Mrs. Grundy" of the farmer's wife exists in every circle; her opinions have more to do with the struggling gaiety of the world than its children would like to confess.

Sir Frederick Arden had very great tact. He appeared intuitively to

understand, at a glance, the exact relations in which a crowd of people stood to one another; and he soon contrived to settle Mr. and Mrs. Gudge comfortably for the evening, by placing them down at the most distant card-table with an old lady who would have played with the evil one himself, but for the bad chance she would have had of winning anything, rather than not get a rubber; and, as luck would have it, a country lawyer, with whom he was in communication respecting some distant borough.

But Lady Arden was not yet quite at ease. Sir Frederick had hardly returned, when she suddenly exclaimed to him:

"Why—look, Frederick—in the drawing-room. If there is not Mrs. Hamper after all, I declare. And come in that terrible old Egyptian dress, as you call it."

"I thought I told you not to ask her," said the Baronet, vexedly.

"I never did," replied Lady Arden. "She asked *me* to invite her, as soon as she heard of the party; and I wrote back to say how sorry I was, but we were not able to offer her a bed, and could not pay her the empty compliment of inviting her without."

"Well, was not that enough?"

"I should have thought so. Here she comes, and Fanny with her. Oh!"

Lady Arden sighed loudly as the new arrivals advanced towards her. The eldest of these was a stout lady, in a dress of a fantastic, half-washed-out pattern—chocolate figures on a yellow ground—trimmed with so extraordinary an arrangement of fringe, and tassels, and large buttons, that one might have imagined she had selected her models from a decorative upholsterer's, instead of a milliner's. She was passed a certain age, whatever that is precisely, but her dress was cut very low, and her head, void of cap or turban, was crossed by one or two bands of what appeared to be shoe-string, and little rosettes over the temples, like those on the head-pieces of horses' bridles. Her daughter was with her, an exceedingly pretty girl of seventeen—Mrs. Hamper said she was only twelve, and wonderful for her age; so she was—badly dressed in cloudy muslin and crumpled gimp; and her figure was kept down by the utter absence of crenoline. It was a very nice figure, though; an uncommonly rebellious one for twelve.

"Did you ever see such an exhibition?" said Lady Arden, in a low tone to her husband. Then, altering her voice suddenly, she said, with a smile,

"Ah, Mrs. Hamper, this is very kind of you to come after such an apparently rude note."

Mrs. Hamper, eccentric as she was, belonged to too good a county family to be palpably offended.

"Which note, my dear Lady Arden?" she inquired; "I have received no note. I have come up from Cowes expressly to the party. I dare say it has followed me there."

Lady Arden looked at her husband, as if she did not altogether think it had.

"Did you come from the railway, then, across the country?"

"No, from London, from London," said Mrs. Hamper; "I forgot all about Richmond. We came down very pleasantly with the Twickenham carrier, in his tilted cart. For, you know, Fanny's education costs so much that we must look to expenses, and the cabs asked thirty shillings, but I bargained with the carrier for half-a-crown."

"But how will you get back again?" asked Lady Arden, with some misgivings.

"Oh, that is nothing; we shall be sure to find some one going back. If not, I suppose Fanny and I can have the drawing-room. We shall not put you out, I know."

Lady Arden scarcely knew what she replied, as Mrs. Hamper bustled off with her daughter to the temporary room. Sir Frederick was about to join in the laugh that followed her departure, when one of the servants approached him, and told him quietly that a boat was at the waterside, with two men in it, who insisted upon seeing somebody named Gudge, whom they knew to be there.

The Baronet started at the information. He directed the man where to find the visitor in question, and added that he would wait for him outside the tent. Mr. Gudge was not long in making his appearance; and, after a quick exchange of words, the two walked together towards the river. It was just light enough to discover a boat, containing two figures, pulled in amongst the branches of the largest weeping willow.

"Who's there?" cried Sir Frederick.

"All right!" was the reply, in a tone which Mr. Gudge recognized.

"Skittler?" he exclaimed.

"That's me," answered the man, running the boat along the bank with his hands; "and this is Sprouts. He's got a letter for you, that come in a hurry, after you left. He went to Brompton, and found you was here, but hadn't a blessed mag with him, so he came back to me to know what to do."

"Where is the letter?" asked Gudge eagerly; adding, "I say, Sir F., this may be interesting to both of us."

"All right," answered Skittler, taking off his neck-cloth, "I thought I'd best mind it, for Sprouts isn't much count; so I wrapped it up here. We was too late for the busses, but I borrowed Joe Tim's Tagglony ginger-beer waggon, and druv down his donkey."

"Come, hand it up," said Mr. Gudge.

"I'm a coming to it," answered Skittler, who was judging of the presumed importance of the document by the impatience exhibited to see it; and was unfolding it slowly from one of those wonderful convolutions of handkerchief which the lower orders love so to adopt. "I'm a coming to it. We had a job, after all, to see you. They wouldn't let us in, no ways, in front; but I wasn't to be done; so I pulled round here in a boat, until the flunkey came to turn me away. Here it is."

He threw the packet to Mr. Gudge. It was too dark to read it, and Sir Frederick directed him to take down one of the lamps that were suspended from the trees. Skittler came on shore, and did as he was told; and the lawyer then made out the following note, with a little difficulty:

"Honrd sir this cum to say as Rockey karnt rede & rite but that it is all trewe and the littel Boy is gon and honrd sir he dunnow ware but thinks He is aliv and wil do is best and warnt no forlt of isen the nite Fletcher was took bad and guv up his gost Honrd sir as it leves me at present from yure respectbel servant H. Cooper."

A whistle of perplexity, from Mr. Gudge, followed the reading of the note. He then looked at Sir Frederick, and said, shortly,

"I had suspected this; pleasant, eh? Sir F. What do you think of it?"

The Baronet returned no answer for some seconds. At last, he said to his companion:

"Gudge, we must talk this over a little. Take a turn with me round the grounds, and we may decide on something."

They were leaving the bank, when Skittler exclaimed:

"I ask your pardon, but there seems to be a little going on here. Which is the governor?"

"I am the master," said Sir Frederick, "if that is what you mean."

"Your servant, Sir," replied Skittler, touching his hat. "You wouldn't grudge a drop to drink, I suppose, for me and my pardner there; or rather for him, for he terribly wants it, if you was to see him. He's such a growing boy! Ullow! Sprouts!"

The hail had the effect of bringing the long clerk from the boat, and he climbed up the bank like a large spider.

"There, go and get what you like," said Sir Frederick. "You'll find all the servants in the kitchen."

And calling one of the attendants to conduct the new comers to that locality, he caught Mr. Gudge by the arm, and disappeared along one of the trellised walks, whilst Mr. Skittler and Sprouts followed the guide towards the kitchen.

There were a great many servants there—coachmen, and footmen, and helpers; and all the strange race that a large evening party in the country brings together. There was plenty of refreshment for them at the same time; large, cold joints of meat; important cans of beer; flat stone bottles of spirits; and as every new comer was an excuse for drinking all the toasts over again, the meeting was becoming exceedingly communicative and above vulgar prejudices, which, in the beginning, had somewhat operated against the fly-drivers on the part of the family coachmen. The dancing-marquee was near the kitchen windows, so that all the music could be heard very plainly; and served for a great many extempore fandangos between the visitors and the female domestics.

Mr. Skittler was not particularly abashed when he entered the society. He saluted them by pitching his hat into the air and catching it again on his head as it descended; and then he presented Sprouts to

the assembled company, as "a young gentleman as had got a good deal more in him than anybody would fancy from looking at his build;" and finally, he took up a jug of beer, and concisely proposed "luck" as a toast.

The social talents of Mr. Skittler were of a very high order; and he was soon regarded as an acquisition to the party. Being a perfect professor of public-house parlour magic, he balanced tobacco-pipes on his nose until they tumbled down and broke; and then with the bits he worked mysterious problems of stolen horses, and dishonest diamond-setters; and of a man who having to ferry a fox, a goose, and a sack of oats, across a river, in a diminutive boat that would only hold one of the objects besides himself, was sadly perplexed as to which he could leave together. He knocked halfpence, too, through the tops of hats—not his own, nor Sprout's, for in either case the performance would not then have been one of remarkable difficulty; and showed how to toss, and always won; and swallowed several knives and pepper-casters; and made smoke come out of his ears and nostrils—in fact, proved himself a perfect master of all those modern miracles which the scientific spirits of the age are wont to term "dodges." He was wonderfully applauded, except by an old coachman, of great importance, who was seated in a porter's chair; and, after grunting and puffing considerably, and looking with immense contempt on Mr. Skittler, whispered to the lady's-maid, that "such things was low—uncommon low."

Their amusements were at their height, when the kitchen door suddenly opened, and, to the astonishment of everybody, Mrs. Hamper made her appearance with one of Sir Frederick's servants behind her, who had shown her the way, and now looked over her shoulder, grinning at the rest. All the company rose as she entered, for they all knew her; indeed she would have found some difficulty in going anywhere without universal recognition.

"Don't disturb yourselves," said Mrs. Hamper; "pray be seated. I only want to know who's going to town to-night. Ah! Stevens," she said, as she saw a face she knew; "is Lady Parlawar's carriage here? Do you think she can take me and my daughter back?"

"I'm afraid she can't, mum," replied the man. "The young ladies was complaining they hadn't room enough, coming; elsewise I'm sure she would."

"Davis—you're Davis, I think," she said directly to another, "Sir Crindle Waahy's groom?"

The man touched an imaginary hat.

"Has Sir Crindle got his barouche down to-night?"

"No 'm, he havn't," was the answer. "He drove Lord Adolphus down in his cab."

"Dear—dear—it is very provoking," said Mrs. Hamper. "I don't see how I am to get home. I thought I should find out who had carriages back to town better by coming here than in the ball-room. Is the Honourable Mrs. Tucker's man here?"

"Hallo! Eddards—don't you hear?" said Sir Crindle's groom, maliciously jogging his neighbour, who evidently was not inclined to answer. "Hi! here's Mrs. Hamper wants you."

"Ask pardon, mam," exclaimed the man. "Mrs. Tucker's going on to East Moulsey, to-night; she don't return."

"What must be done!" cried Mrs. Hammond, in despair. "Is there anybody—anything—anywhere—going back to town?"

In a minute Skittler was on his legs.

"I've got a neat little wehicle, down here, mum," he said. "'Tisn't large, but it's wery compact. How many's a going?"

"I and my daughter—two only—a mere nothing," answered Mrs. Hamper.

"I think we may call that three, mum" said Skittler, looking at her. "However, if you likes to go, I'll take you."

"But your terms, my good man?"

"Oh, we shan't fall out, I'll be bound. My friend here, and me, will run by the side, and we'll take you up as right as ninepence."

"Ninepence," thought Mrs. Hamper to herself; "it isn't dear. Very well," she continued aloud, "I will send to you when we are ready."

She was about to depart, when her eye fell upon a cold round of beef, which Sprouts had hitherto quietly monopolized.

"Dear me," she said, "what a remarkably nice joint; and so beautifully cooked. Mrs. Dixon—here; come here, half a minute."

The cook, whom she had just addressed, looked at her neighbours and came to her side.

"You couldn't cut me a slice or two off—could you?" asked Mrs. Hamper, in a low tone. "Or perhaps your friend will," alluding to Sprouts. "It looks so very nice. And really at hotels, where we now stay, everything costs so much. And I may tell you, Mrs. Dixon, as an old servant of Sir Frederick's, Fanny's education is so expensive, that you know, every little—yes, that's it, just there, and a little of that fat—every little assists, so to say."

"You would like a sandwich, ma'am," said the cook.

"No—no, Mrs. Dixon; I don't want it to eat now. Now, you couldn't find me a piece of a newspaper, could you? or a clean knife-cloth? Why, this is the very thing!"

She took up a napkin as she spoke, and folded the cold beef carefully therein, to the intense delight of the lookers-on. And then taking up part of her Egyptian dress, as it had been called, she found out the entrance to a pocket, of a size that might very conveniently have been hung up inside a bachelor's boot-closet for the reception of whatever his laundress thereafter intended to call for. Into that, large as it was, the beef was with some little trouble deposited; and, telling Mr. Skittler she would let him know when she thought of starting, she left the kitchen.

There was a pause of a few seconds after the door was shut, followed by a roar of laughter from the company.

"Well," observed Skittler, "if that don't beat cockfighting I'm—all sorts of things: and she's a-going back in the Tagglony's ginger-beer cart. Lor! what a game that will be, Sprouts."

The lank clerk returned no answer. Taking Mrs. Hamper's act as a precedent, he was folding a very fair slice of the beef in three yards of new and favourite songs, previously to depositing it in his hat.

"Sprouts!" repeated Skittler, in a louder tone; "if you eats any more of that you'll go off with a bang, and burst your boiler. Suppose you run up to the public, and bring down the vehicle: it will help your digestion. Going back in the Tagglony. Ho! ho!"

And the mere anticipation of the journey was quite enough to amuse Mr. Skittler for the remainder of the evening, without any extraneous entertainment.

CHAPTER VI.

CHRISTOPHER PROCEEDS ON HIS JOURNEY.

Two good miles had been cleared between Christopher and the salt-works before he thought of stopping. He had clambered through hedges, and crossed lanes, and occasionally slipped into unforeseen hollows, and ditches covered with duck-weed, that he mistook in the moonlight for smooth turf. But at last he came to a point where the road divided, and he halted a minute to see if it was possible to make out the direction on the finger post.

He did not mistake it for a ghost, as some weak-minded traveller is legended to have done. We do not ourselves believe that such an error was ever committed by any body. For if it was light he could soon have seen directly what it was: and if it was dark he could not have seen it at all. At the same time the anecdote is entitled to respect as a sample of the fine old English class of story-books.

We are not inclined to quarrel, though, with the story-books; for their earliest impressions last as vivid as when they were first made, through all the trials, and rebuffs, and anxiety, and wear and tear of spirits and energy, that go to make up an existence dependant only upon itself for its support. We look back to them sometimes; and the glance is as refreshing as hearing a child laugh: at the same time it really delights us to find that we are not quite blunted to old associations. We wish that books now-a-days would interest us as deeply: we know it is wrong to say so, but we are afraid it is true. What expeditions of modern times, even of Eothen or Titmarsh, engaged us so much as Kceper's Travels in search of his Master? What hero or heroine of late—Coningsby, or Margaret Catchpole—held the place that *Lazy Laurence*, or *Simple Susan*, did in our affections? Knowledge has never been since diffused, not excepting by the Messrs. Chambers, like that which the Scenes in Europe unfolded to our wondering minds: nor were even the Pleiads of Tennyson, "glittering like a swarm of fire-flies tangled in a silver braid" half so striking as the wonder-exciting and twinkling little star, "like a diamond in the sky" of the *Nursery Rhymes*. Nor was the fate of any fallen house or destiny, of the modern novelist, so touching as that of the building which Sandford and Merton took such pains to raise. There are illustrated works too, now, —from the designs of luckless high art to those of successful commonplace—but they do not come up to the *Looking Glass*, with *Bewick's* cut of Alfred, who went to see the flowers with Dorinda, and kept his coat tails under his arm, that he might not hurt them. It may be very childish and maudlin to confess it, yet we sometimes wish that we could

have a good cry, as we did of yore, over the first story in that charming book, of the little boy who jumped into his mother's grave. But our eyes—those safety valves of the heart when too much pressure is laid on—are old, and tough, and past action.

Christopher could not make much out of the finger-post, for the moon was on the other side of it, and the letters were in deep shade. But the pause reminded him that he was quite out of breath: and he sat down upon the little bit of grass where the road divided, to rest for a few minutes. It was a mild, still night; the earth itself appeared to be asleep: and not a sound was heard, but, now and then, that of some restless cattle-bell, or the bay of a dog called forth by the noise.

He was not afraid. He had known few companions except those which nature had found for him, and therefore, even with trees, he felt still in good society. But he was beginning to get very hungry, and he had nothing in his pockets but a lump of salt, which although useful in its way as a condiment, cannot be said, by itself, to be very filling at its price. Money he had none: once freed from the mines, it does not often care to come back again, and therefore he understood but little about it: and if he had possessed any, it would have been of no more use to him than Robinson Crusoe's when he resided at the Herne Bay of the South Pacific Ocean.

He had rested for about five minutes, when he fancied he heard the distant sound of voices, at the end of the road; and straining his eyes through the moonlight, in the direction, he distinctly saw something moving apparently towards him. His first idea was that the people from the works had started in pursuit of him; but recollecting immediately, that no one, in all probability, was aware of his flight, and that the road ran in the direction of the very stars he had seen before him as he had come to his present station, he awaited the approach of the object.

He soon ascertained that it was formed by a group of two or three people, driving a donkey before them, laden with bundles of canvass and stakes, on the top of which was seated a little child, who, beneath the enormous old bonnet on its head, might have passed for a monkey just as readily. They came on still talking and laughing, and at last arrived at the finger-post, where they stopped as soon as they perceived the runaway.

"Halloo! young'un," said a man of the party, "who are you?"

"Please, I'm Christopher," answered the boy meekly.

"And what are you doing here?"

"I've run away from the salt-works. Don't take me back again."

"Oh, we're not going to take you back again," said the man. "But you can't stay here all night, you know: eh? do you know anybody to go to, or where you are?"

Christopher returned no answer: for what with imagining that the interrogator looked at him severely, and what with having no reply to make, he was very much confused. So he put the back of his wrist to his eyes, and began to cry.

"There! don't cry," said the man: "we're not going to hurt you. Suppose you come on to the village with us. Come: there's a good boy. That's it. Don't be afraid."

There was something really so kind in the man's voice, that Christopher's fright in a great measure vanished as he spoke. He was a comical looking fellow, much under the middling size, with an old soldier's coat on, the tails of which dragged upon the ground. He also wore a cocked hat, so much larger than himself that, set sideways upon his head as it was, it gave him the look of an inverted cheese-cutter.

"I reckon you havn't got much luggage," continued the man looking about. "There: come along. We'll find a bit of supper before long."

Christopher got up, and was directly ready to start with his new friends. The others of the party consisted of a woman who was carrying a heavy box slung over her shoulders: and a thin tall man to whose care the guidance of the donkey was intrusted.

They moved on again: the boy keeping by the side of the person who had first addressed him, and who appeared to have a very strong native talent for music; for from the minute they started, until their next halt he never ceased singing. But it was not a regular song that he indulged in. He confined himself only to the beginning of popular ballads—just as if he was singing through the index of the *Little Warbler*: one of those medleys, in fact, which you see in song books 'as sung at the London concerts,' but are never by any chance fortunate enough to hear. And every now and then, he stopped suddenly, as if inspired, and commenced a series of remarkable distortions of his limbs, wherever he found a piece of soft turf by the wayside. His companion appeared to think nothing of this, going on as usual; but to Christopher the performance was a matter of great wonder, who usually stopped to admire him until the fit was over.

"Ho!" he cried suddenly after one of these outbursts, as some object at the roadside caught his eye: "here's a hedge hog! Well, we're in luck to-night in the way of supper. Did you ever eat hedgehog, little man?"

Christopher owned that the delicacy was as yet an unknown dish.

"Ah! well then: wait till we're all right to-night, and you'll see if there's any clay nigh at hand. Here, missus; here's a prize!"

His companion who was going on in front, halted as he took up the animal from the road, and dropped it into a bag that hung from the donkey: whilst Christopher wondered inwardly what species of domestic cookery could possibly apply to it. They went on, along the high road, bordered on either side by wide open tracts of grass, and dark hills in the far distance, until they saw the outlines of a church and houses before them. At the entrance of the village—for such it appeared to be—the man stopped his humble caravan. There were evidently preparations for a festival going on. The green was covered with caravans and tents, in the latter of which lights were burning, making them look like very large lanterns planted here and there. There was a ceaseless round, too, of hammers, engaged in building on a light scale: and skeleton booths, like the dissected barns of the toy shops, came out strong against the moonlight.

CHAPTER VII.

CHRISTOPHER MAKES HIS FIRST APPEARANCE IN PUBLIC.

As soon as the procession halted at the green, the man who had first noticed Christopher, lifted the little girl, hitherto hidden under the large bonnet, from the donkey; and then began to unload the animal, assisted by his tall thin companion. They stuck the ends of the long sticks into the turf, bending them into arches, and over this they pulled a canvass, so that in a few minutes something like a tent was erected.

Considered as the habitation of a moderate family, it was not very commodious; being of the size and shape of a cart tilt, and confining the manner of entrance and egress to a badger-like process of being obliged to creep in head foremost, and back out. But to judge from the number of similar tenements which the moonlight revealed on the outskirts of the green, it was a popular style of abode, and capable of containing not only the domestic circle of the owner, but whatever live stock he was in possession of. For when morning came, it was wonderful what a swarm of life emerged from these tents. The plan adopted to have lodged them must have been that of the Noah's Arks, which, popularly speaking, we hold to be the most confused and inconvenient stowage of animals and passengers ever tolerated.

But it was now night: and only upon the green were there signs of watchful active life to be found. Elsewhere everything was at rest. Not a leaf quivered in the trees: the few cloudy patches were stationary in the dark blue sky: and even the water-course that bubbled and sparkled in the noontide, crept with a subdued gurgle through its tiny watery groves, as though afraid to wake the sleepy cresses and forget-me-nots that bordered it. The daisies and buttercups had long ago turned in and closed their petals up into their own nightcaps; and many a shining-coated insect cuddled itself up within the little tents thus made, until they opened in the morning sunlight, and washed their bright awnings in the dew-drops.

But, as we have said, all was bustle on the green. The hammers kept on sounding: and long planks were drawn from waggons and slapped down on one another; and human outlines were seen on the tops of rickety ladders leaning against nothing, or climbing along fearful rafters, kept up only in the air by small nails and packthread. Preparations for swings, roundabouts, and other mighty engines of indisposition were also perceptible: and now and then a hollow roar proceeded from a looming quadrangle of caravans, whose bare poles would be in the morning crowded with terror-striking pictures of all the animals to be found in the world, as well as of several others hitherto considered apocryphal.

"Oh, this world is but a nest and mankind is only birds!" sang Christopher's friend as he surveyed the new tent. "Whether in the

east, or whether in the west, we'll have such a supper to-night: and sing Hey down, ho down, derry derry down, oh! the humours of Bartlemy fair, oh!"

Having carolled which snatches, he played a kind of symphony by slapping his knees with the palms of his hands, and then he stretched his legs out, and sank down until his form resembled a letter T turned upside down, after which he affected to go into a calm artistic sleep for half a minute, using his lace-up boot for a pillow.

"Hickory," said the thin tall man who had led the donkey, "we'll have supper first, I think. How about the hedge-hog?"

"Oh, he's lovely—he's divine," replied his musical companion springing to his legs again; "and stands in his pride alone, like a old oak. Here he is."

The mention of the hedge-hog appeared to have aroused all his faculties. He continued his vocalization as he pulled the hedge-hog from the bag and laid it on the ground.

"Now missus," he said to the woman: "make up the fire, and I'll be the cook."

Christopher had seated himself upon the box, which the woman had now placed on the ground, and was gazing with some feelings of misgiving at the prickly ball which was destined to form their supper, looking about as digestible as a huge thistle or a chestnut shuck. The little girl was at his feet, still bearing the appearance of a large bonnet that somebody had left forgotten on the ground. The woman, having collected some sticks and chips, was lighting a fire; whilst the thin man had gone to the stream, and returned carrying a lump of clay as big as a quatern loaf. And when the wood had burnt into glowing embers, the cookery commenced under the direction of Hickory, who turned his cocked hat into bellows for the occasion; and never stopped his melodies, but was perpetually following the drum, sparing the tree, healing the smiling morn, braving a thousand years, and astonishing the Browns.

This is the way the hedge-hog was cooked. Hickory first knocked him on the head, and threw its body upon the embers: and then in half a minute pulling it out again, scrubbed it with what appeared to be a superannuated clothes brush, which brought all the bristles off.

"Stop a minute," he went on singing and talking, during the cookery. "Stop a minute, and let's bark him, first. Oh proud must be our admiral of such a jolly what's-his-name; oh, proud must be—tol de rol—de—rol."

The words died into a confidential burden, as his attention was newly occupied. He took some of the clay, and casing the hedge-hog up in it, as in a paste, again returned it in the embers.

"There's a sight for his father, if he had one: he wouldn't know him," continued Hickory. "Oh, no we never mention, how his childhood flitted by, the thingumyjigs of his—two or three more sticks, missus: that's it: now he'll soon be done."

He threw some fresh fuel on the fire, and heaped the ashes over the



Illustration of the scene in the play

intended delicacy. And then, still singing, he busied himself about the little encampment, until by certain signs he conceived the cookery to be finished, when he hooked it from the fire, and cracked the clay with his boot. The skin of the hedge-hog adhered to the envelop; but the body was turned out hot and steaming, and as dainty to the look as that of a rabbit. He then split it down the back—removed the inside, which came away all together dry and hard; and placed the dish, with an air of great satisfaction before his fellows.

"There's a treat!" he said. "Now, little fellow, you've had nothing lately I reckon, so you shall be helped first. There—that's beautiful: don't be afraid: it won't bite you."

He offered a piece, which he cut off with his clasp knife, to Christopher, accompanied by a piece of bread produced from his pocket. The boy was afraid to take it at first, never having before indulged in such a luxury. But it really looked so tempting, and he felt so very hungry, that all scruples were soon overcome: and he fell into it as though it had been the greatest delicacy known.

"That's it, my little man," exclaimed Hickory, as he looked at him. "Isn't it good neither, eh? Only wants a bit of salt, does it? And then it would be just like grouse, wouldn't it?"

"I've got some salt," said Christopher eagerly, as he produced the lump of shining rock—his sole wealth—from his pocket: but not knowing whether grouse was caught in ponds, or gathered in kitchen-gardens.

"Law!" replied Hickory, turning over the chrystal in his hand, "who'd have thought that was salt? In the deep, deep sea, in the deep, deep—curious now, ain't it? And you come from the works, didn't you? What made you run away? Off! off! said the—who dy'e call him, I reckon, wasn't it?"

"Please don't send me back. Rockey's going to take me to the coal pit if you do," said Christopher, looking earnestly at the man with his large bright eyes, as he put down his food.

"Don't be frightened," replied Hickory, "I told you we were all right. But, tell me now, where's father?"

"He's very bad and dead," murmured Christopher.

"And havn't you got a mother?"

The child stared at Hickory as if he scarcely understood him, and then he asked:—

"Which mother?"

"Curous again," said Hickory, "don't know what a mother is! I've heard none of them children in the mines ever does. They never have any I reckon: they're dug up ready born, I shouldn't wonder. If great people find their children in parsley beds with silver spades, why shouldn't poor people dig theirs out of mines with pickaxes. Nature's the same anywheres, which nobody can deny, can 'em?"

Christopher certainly did not seem inclined to dispute the alleged fact, or indeed to return any answer at all, so perfectly incomprehensible was Hickory's theory of population to him. So he fell back upon his supper: whilst the others produced a quantity of broken victuals

from the bag the donkey had carried, and gathered round the fire to discuss their meal.

"We shall have a fine day, to-morrow," said the thin tall man, looking up to the sky. "The moon's as clean as a penny. I'm glad of it. I never can tumble, with them rheumatics."

"Lovely night, lovely night," sang Mr. Hickory: "many call thee all manners of names; but it's very lucky just now, because our accommodations is rather pinched. Your missus and you, and Patsy will have the tent. I can get a corner of the menagery, and take little fellow with me."

"You can ask Parnter to put you in a empty cage," replied the thin tall man: "if he's got one. The last time I slept there the pelican of the wilderness got out in the night, and bolted my shoes which I took off for comfort."

In a short time the caravan broke up. Luddy and his wife, took the little child, who had been asleep under the large bonnet ever since they had halted, into the tent; and his companion telling Christopher to come with him, led him across the green in the direction of the wild beast show.

He exchanged greetings with a few of the wandering tribes as he passed: for there seemed to be a sort of free-masonry amongst them: and then went unchallenged up the steps of the menagerie and descended into the interior.

A solitary candle was burning on the hoop that hung from the roof: and threw its feeble light over the forms of the people connected with the caravan, who were lying here and there and about on the ground. They were all asleep: for there was not much to guard: any one was at liberty to carry off the elephant or hyena, that chose to make the attempt. Many of the beasts themselves were reposing, dreaming of their jungles as they sniffed, and snorted, and blew away the saw-dust of the floor from their nostrils. One or two there were who never went to sleep at all, but kept on their ceaseless motion backwards and forwards, or round and round, in their cages until the very floor was worn with their paws: and some others who dozed all day, and got convivially disposed as night approached, now and then volunteering a solo which usually ended in a chorus.

It was fortunate for Christopher's peace of mind that the dull light revealed so little of the animals' forms. Tired as he was, he readily obeyed the orders of his companion, and stretching himself upon the grateful floor of mingled turf and saw-dust, was soon unconscious of everything about him. And so the night passed away.

Great bustle came with the morning sun; and when he awoke and saw the dreadful monsters that had surrounded him, and of whose forms he had hitherto been utterly ignorant, he was for scrambling away as fast as his hands and legs would allow. But Hickory somewhat tranquillized him by showing him it was possible to be on very intimate, if not actually visiting terms with the inmates of the caravans. And then he took him to the brooklet, which was now wide awake and rattling away merrily over the pebbles, tumbling over itself, and hurrying on

to make room for all that was coming after it, as though it bore the most important business on its surface instead of a few shining bubbles and May blossoms, that ran endless races, amidst the greatest excitement of the cresses and forget-me-nots, who jostled and nodded, and bent down to look after them as they passed. Here they made their toilet : and then joined their party.

The bustle soon began, early as it was, for it was May fair morning. Whole acres of hurdle-pens had arisen in the night, and these were soon filled with sheep so tightly packed, that nothing but figs or omnibuses could have exceeded them. Carts came in from every direction, driven by burly men in green smock frocks, and covered with netting beneath which restless pigs did all they could to render each other miserable. And when a pig escaped during his suspensory journey from the cart to the pen, what a holiday it was for the boys—for some of the boys had been up all night, from mere excitement. How they drove him where he was not wanted to go, and hemmed him into inconvenient corners, and chivied him right over the display of vacillating crockery—of unsteady tea-pots and revolving plates—that the cunning salesman was disposing, so attractively, on the ground. A pig once loose that day, was never seen again by his owner. He fled direct to secret fastnesses in woods and copses, and turned hermit : or fell into alien sties, and ultimately graced the halls of the stranger with his fitches.

The stall people were next at work, as their little pavilions made perfect streets across the green. Very marvellous were some of the things, intended to be eaten, which they set out : but those of gingerbread were the most incomprehensible. There were chanticleers proclaiming the morn in trousers much too large for them : and royal personages whose consumption involved the digestion of dutch metal and red ribbon in unlimited quantities ; and there were small gingerbread buttons in red tin boxes, labelled "spicy," the eating of which brought about the gasping state of palate that the very young gentleman about town might be supposed to suffer from, who rashly ordered deviled kidneys for supper at a tavern, to look 'fast,' before he understood their nature. And there were also the simple gingerbread nuts of commerce, which you are so urgently requested to taste, at fairs and races, as though, the lives and souls of the generous young ladies, who liberally present you with the sample, depended upon the quantity they got rid of. And hard indeed must have been the rustic heart that the "Now, my dear, let me weigh you a pound," did not walk right into at once, direct and unchallenged.

Next the cheap toy booths unfurled their packages of grey dutch paper, and fluttered their packthread fiddles and tinselled dowager-looking dollies in the wind. Birds of unknown lands, with one superlative feather in their poll, who bobbed their heads and tails as, screwed to the table, they looked after the pear that swung below them ; little men who were jointed only at their hips, and worked curious machinery, in bright green hats and round black frock coats—descendants of Noah's wife by her second marriage with the captain of the chip box

cavalry; monkeys who were pushed over the top of a stick, only to be pulled back again, and yet preserved an air of merriment under the most uncomfortable circumstances: endless processions to music, of foreign poultry, who popped up from one sentry box, and bustled down into another, for the delight of a lady, with a minute aquiline nose, and one eye at the side of her head, evidently a family connection of the industrious artisan before alluded to: others of the same race, turning round in a dreary dance before a tree, that might have been planted from a sampler, with its leaves in a high state of curled shaving, to the melody of a harp with three limp strings—all these curious creations, burst forth like winking Mary-buds to the rising sun.

There were many things for recreation, besides. Snuff-boxes and pincushions, and prolific lemons with kernels of tea-things in the seventh fruity envelop—objects of art whose tendency to fall straight downwards into yawning holes when thrown at, might have set Newton a-thinking, long before the especial apple drummed into his head the theory of weight, and turned his mind from mirth to gravity. And there were alluring arrows that spun round on pivots, and always stopped at one of thirty different objects,—tea-caddies, beads, knives and brooches—but never at that especial one, on which the half-penny was ventured.

Refreshments, too, were being unpacked from hampers and covered barrows—marvellous shell-fish, the like of which had been never seen, except turned into pin-cushions at sea-side libraries—strange pastry made into pies, containing within small cubes of peppered indian-rubber—terrible sausages, whose components no man might analyze satisfactorily—oysters out of season, large as plates, whose shells blanched on the green until the next year came round again—tubs of beer, even, shaded with fern, under leafy hedges: and more ginger-beer, and pop, and gaseous drinks in general, than would have sufficed to turn the whole population of the parish into so many balloons, and blown them up to any height the atmospherical density would have permitted them to arrive at.

All these things were so many wonders to Christopher, and opened an entirely new world to him at the first glance: his fear, however, would not permit him to venture alone amongst them: and so he continued with his new friends all the morning. The fair was not yet at its height. The burly men bought and sold their pigs: and horse-dealers rode shouting and bawling through the mob, showing off animals that, like French clocks won at raffles, had somehow or another been wound up to go for a little time only, and then stop for good. But when the afternoon came, the pleasure folks poured in, in crowds, from the neighbourhood—along green lanes and pathways, and across pleasant fields. Then, too, the show people came out in wondrous splendour, to dazzle the natives, from their canvass splendour: and imposing cartoons, representing the wonders to be seen within, and the elegant company of all nations that were looking on, were unfurled on the caravans: and daring couples rose high in air, above the stalls, in the ups and downs, and shrieked as they descended: or whirled round

and round amidst the huzzas of the boys, until they tumbled from their cockhorses for very giddiness. And all was life and motion ; bells, speaking trumpets, swings, rattles and sunshine.

And now Hickory and his party prepared to astonish the world. The thin tall man fetched a ladder, a large box, and a drum from a neighbouring booth, which had been brought on in the owner's waggon from the last fair : and then made his own toilet, which was that of a clown. The large bonnet being removed, from where it had apparently been all night, discovered the little girl in an undecided costume, that a Scotch child might be supposed to wear after living a little while in Turkey. Hickory himself brushed up his cocked hat, stuck a red paper bow on it, and mounted a pair of worsted epaulettes : whilst the woman tied a handkerchief in the French style about her head, and took a tambourine.

" I wish we could do something with you," said Hickory to Christopher, " there's been no time to learn you anything yet : so you must mind the money."

" I can pitch a pie," said Christopher, who had some notion, from what he had seen of Hickory's performance on the previous evening, that such an accomplishment was useful.

" Can you ?" exclaimed Hickory : " that's capital. Let's see you."

To his unbounded delight, the little boy turned head over heels, and then went along upon his hands and feet like a wheel.

" Famous ! hooray !" cried Hickory. " Where did you learn that ?"

" We used to do it, at the side of the gentlefolks' carriages," replied Christopher as soon as he got breath.

" Oh—we shall make a great tumbler of you," said Hickory. " How lucky it was you fell in with us. Who knows what you may come to some day—perhaps a Bounding Ball of the Pyrenees, or an Olympian Brother. Think of that !"

It was directly decided that Christopher should begin his public career at once, then and there. An ancient spangled jacket made for somebody four times his size, was rummaged out of the property box in which he was forthwith invested. The little girl was tied up to the top of a pair of stilts. The thin clown, putting on an old great coat over his finery, took up the drum and Pandæan pipes, and Hickory and the woman followed. And then they at once plunged into the thick of the fair.

An audience was soon collected. Luddy played a solo on the drum, whilst the other walked the toes of the spectators into a circle, and the performance commenced with a comic song, after which Hickory made a speech :—

" Now's your time, Ladies and Gents," he commenced, " to see things that'll open your eyes as wide as a lawyer's conscience—"

" And make your wit as sharp as the thick end of a pennorth of cheese I had for breakfast," chimed in Luddy.

" The thin end, Mr. Merryman, you mean," said Hickory.

" No, Sir," replied the other : " it was so small it had not got a thin end."

jungle. Here, were the black patches that the different fires scorched in the grass; there, one of the dancing booths had been, where the narrow planking had pressed all the life out of the turf, and necks of bottles, and broken pipes, and nutshells bordered it. The children looked upon these vestiges, we say, almost with feelings of veneration, as marking the great epoch of their lives. For with them it was all magic: their eyes were kaleidoscopes in the production of dazzling and ever-varying images, until time broke up the delusion, and showed them, sometimes too ruthlessly, that all they had been admiring was made up but of shadows, and borrowed brightness, and bits of rubbish.

The party to which Christopher belonged was the last to move. Patsy was once more covered over by her large bonnet, and then with Luddy, his wife, and the box of apparatus and costume, contrived to get a lift in an empty cage of the menagerie—the ex-residence of a deceased bison—where the only inconvenience was that of being shut up all day with only a light in the roof, which gave the journey the appearance of being made in something between a diving-bell and a parliamentary train carriage.

Hickory and Christopher went together, the little boy being promoted to the singularly insecure position on the donkey, *vice* Patsy retired. They made short stages, and stopped in the evenings at the humblest public-houses, where, by a display of his necromancy, Hickory generally contrived to pick up enough for the next day's support. And one evening after two or three of these had passed, they came near a vast city, and then Hickory informed his little companion that they were approaching the confines of mighty Liverpool.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. HAMPER RETURNS IN STATE TO TOWN.

SIR FREDERICK ARDEN, with Mr. Gudge on his arm, took the most retired path he could find for conference with the attorney, not wishing any of his guests to see him on terms of such familiarity. For some little time neither of them spoke. Each waited to see what the other had to say, that he might agree, or contradict, as it seemed best.

"If I could but have reached Paris," said Sir Frederick, at length breaking the silence, "this would never have happened. The children die at the *Enfants Trouvés* like—"

"Whitebait," suggested Mr. Gudge, as the baronet appeared to hang an instant for a simile.

"You don't think the boy has been taken away, do you? That he has been kidnapped to keep in the dark and worry us?"

"Quite impossible, Sir F.," replied Gudge; "besides, who knows about you at all in the matter? The child has run away; he'll perhaps be

picked up and brought back again, when it will be all right, I dare say : at least, I hope so."

"But what can we do—now—at present?" said the baronet, impatiently.

"Nothing more than we have done," answered Gudge. "You may trust to me, you know, your real friend."

Sir Frederick almost shuddered.

"To tell you the truth," continued the attorney, "I was not altogether unprepared for the news. I have always had my eye upon Rocky—a useful fellow, Sir F.; won't stick at anything if he's paid well—but wants watching. He might find it more to his interest to lose the boy than to keep him, eh?"

Mr. Gudge screwed one eye quite close, and halted dead in his walk as he stopped Sir Frederick as well, slightly poking him with his hand.

"I don't understand you," said the baronet, impatiently; "what do you mean?"

"Don't you think if Rocky was to hide the child, in some coal pit, or collier, you would feel more comfortable by paying a small sum to know where he was again: if he wasn't dead, at once, eh? You'd be like a man walking out in a storm, and not knowing where the chimneys would take him next. There's no knowing when he might drop upon you."

"But what course do you mean to follow?"

"Oh—the right thing, Sir F., the right thing. I'll trace him wherever he goes, depend on it; so you can make yourself quite comfortable. What a lucky thing it was we ever met, I often think—don't you?"

"Lady Arden will think it strange in me to be away from the rooms so long," replied the baronet, hastily. "We can talk this matter over more quietly at another opportunity."

Somewhat against Gudge's will, who appeared desirous of following up the conversation, he almost dragged him back to the ball. The dances were going on, in full life, but in the card-room a little unusual excitement appeared to have drawn the idling guests together. Voices, too, were heard,—female voices, above the inspiring notes of the cornet; and although speaking in an angry way, for such a patrician meeting, were evidently productive of amusement rather than confusion amongst the bystanders.

"No, Mam," exclaimed one of the disputants, in a voice which, if Mr. Gudge had not been too well acquainted with it, a vision of artificial poppies and gold hops coruscating above the heads of the company would have directly identified "No, mam! you will pardon me, but seven and sixpence is the points, and those I'll have, if you please."

"I do not understand you," returned Mrs. Hamper—for she was the lady addressed—as she rose from the card-table; "do you suppose I do not mean to pay you whatever I owe you?"

"No, mam, I suppose nothing—nothing at all, no more than a child unborn; but if you think I cannot count, you are mistaken. Perhaps

the odd trick was yours, mam; and, perhaps, you had the honours, mam. But believe your own eyes," she continued, as she turned over some of the cards. "There! I should think that jack of clubs settled it," she added triumphantly, as she appealed to the company generally, and held the card up like a conjuror.

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamper, "I have not contradicted you. I told you I had no change at present."

"And so you told the gent. you played with last, and there he stands, and let him own it, mam," said Mrs. Gudge, pointing to a respectable elderly individual, who directly vanished amongst the company, in great confusion, at being brought into the dispute. "But I see your ways, mam, and you have not paid him yet—yet! you have not paid him yet!"

And here Mrs. Gudge's colour rose to that flush, that the poppies in her head-dress almost paled by comparison.

"Who can oblige me with some silver, to pay this person?" said Mrs. Hamper, turning round. "My dear Lady Parlawar, may I—?"

"I have nothing but gold," said the lady very readily, as she shewed a diminutive purse, that fairies and fourpenny pieces only could have entered. She had evidently anticipated the question.

"Person, indeed!" continued Mrs. Gudge; "and may I ask whom I have the honour of addressing? Not a person—of course not."

Here Mrs. Gudge curtsied ironically, and bobbed her hops into the candle.

"There is not the slightest occasion for us to become better acquainted, madam," returned Mrs. Hamper; "pray do not forget where you are."

"I do not forget where I am; nor the seven and sixpence, mam," answered Mrs. Gudge, "which small sum it is singular, with so much carriage company, you cannot raise. I am not afraid to be known, mam; as you may ask from one end of Brompton to the other, and back again, if you please; but you would not find a soul to say I did not play that jack of clubs."

"You allude to the knave, I presume," observed Mrs. Hamper with a sneer.

"I allude to nothing, mam, nor nobody; but I'm at liberty to think, and will not be put upon. And if it had been Van Tune, mam, you might have laid a gross, or doubled me, and drawn naturals upon two aces, or twenty, if you'd had the luck, and would not have waited long for my money. For there, mam, there it is; and perhaps I can give you change."

With these words, Mrs. Gudge banged a purse on the table, of the size and fashion that stage peasants decline to accept from preserved noblemen, saying that their feelings are their best reward, which, compared with the bits of tobacco pipe and button shanks that pass current in theatres, is possibly the case.

"You can send in your bill to-morrow, my good woman," said Mrs. Hamper, with perfect repose, turning away from the table. "I presume that plan is most familiar to you."



THE END OF THE WORLD



It is terrible to think upon what the consequences of this last sarcasm might have been upon Mrs. Gudge's excited temperament, had it not been suddenly checked. The hops and poppies were quivering with her emotion, when her husband seized her by the arm, and drew her from the table, not without the greatest exertion, before her rage exploded. It was a bold thing to do: with less courage did the soldier lift up the burning shell and throw it through the window before it burst. Mr. Gudge did not throw the partner of his life through the window: it would have been morally wrong, and physically impossible for him to have done so; but he pulled her angrily from the room, and then walked her on to the lawn, and seated her upon a garden bench, where, reclining her head upon a rustic geranium basket, the thunder-cloud burst into a shower of tears.

"Why couldn't you keep quiet?" observed Mr. Gudge angrily; "you know you must get the worst in a quarrel with that set; I could have told you so. You must be cracked."

"Don't speak sharp, Gudge," sobbed the lady, "not now; I can't bear it. To think of being che—cheated, and abused, when—when my rights was all I wanted, and by such a—such a—a—"

An appropriate epithet not being ready, Mrs. Gudge sobbed louder still, fumbled something from the depths of her pocket like a silver cricket-ball full of holes, which she called her vinegar, and having smelt it until it made her sneeze, was somewhat calmed.

"I think we'd better move off," said Mr. Gudge; "I'm infernally sorry we ever came; we know nobody, and they seem to take good care we shouldn't, too. Never mind, Sir Frederick—never mind: we shall see yet," he muttered in conclusion.

"And not a chance of dancing," observed Mrs. Gudge, still mildly convulsed. "No, Gudge, no; I'll not go. I'll wait until they play a country dance. And then I'll show them that some folks are quite as well brought up as other folks, and a good deal better. Call *that* dancing!" she added, as she looked towards the ball-room; "it's perfectly disgraceful to see people hugging one another in that low manner."

"Didn't you get the money from the woman who owed it you, after all?" asked her husband.

"No, Gudge; but I'll have it, if I move Brompton to Jericho for it. Stop: look there—they are all going from the room; it's for supper, I'm sure. I really want something after what I've gone through."

"You'd better come home," said Mr. Gudge; "you won't get anything here, I can tell you. I know their tricks—one lobster to a cart-load of lettuce, and all the rest cut glass and bright spoons."

"If it's a crust I must have it," replied his wife, "for I feel quite fainty."

And she rose and took Mr. Gudge's arm as she pressed him towards the supper table.

It was fortunate for poor Lady Arden that she had not been a witness of the scene just over. Sir Frederick had been stung deeply: but he endeavoured to laugh it off with the others, speaking of the

attorney and his wife, as 'worthy but eccentric people from the country.' Meanwhile the supper-room was thrown open, and the guests crowded round the glittering tables, which were soon bordered by a standing army of beauty that quite took away the appetites of all the susceptible cavaliers in the room. Mrs. Hamper secured the only chair; and having planted herself within reach of everything, was the last lady to leave when the rest departed.

"My dear Annie," said Lady Arden to one of the Miss Mainwarings, whom she found close to her, "I have scarcely seen you this evening; I hope you have enjoyed yourself."

"Oh! you have given us such a nice party; and we have had such lovely waltzes!" said the pretty girl addressed. "And we have laughed so! Tell me, Lady Arden, who are those very odd persons at the end of the table?"

"Don't ask me," replied the lady addressed, with a sigh of despair; "they are some people Sir Frederick employs in his parliamentary affairs, or law, or something else very dreadful. Pray understand—they are *his* guests."

"They were in the park the day we met you—in the oddest carriage; so absurd to be sure! Oh! and, Lady Arden, we want to ask you something else. We are a little overrun with gentlemen on Thursday; could you manage to get Fanny Hamper for us, without her mother. We were at school at Boulogne together, you know, so we are not strangers."

"The old lady will be sure to come," said Lady Arden. "Stop: she said something about not being able to go home to night. Now suppose, you offer to take Fanny up to London with you, and say you have only room for her."

"But her mamma—"

"Will be sure to fasten on some one. Then you can prevail on the girl to stay. I will manage it for you."

And Lady Arden was now obliged to attend to some half dozen gentlemen, all of whom were requesting permission to give her some wine.

"G.," observed Mrs. Gudge, who had pushed all the plate upon the sideboard into a heap, to clear a space for her plate; "G., if there isn't soup! Law!"

"You may depend upon it it's the thing, though," said Mr. Gudge. "Only speak lower; never be surprized at anything you see—the nobs never are. I've watched them often."

"I'd bet sixpence there'll be fish presently," continued Mrs. Gudge; "I'm sorry oysters are out. I could fancy a little pickled salmon though. G., do you think there is any?"

"No, none," said Mr. Gudge, not looking round, as he collected the jelly of a raised pie upon the top of his knife. "Pshaw! how you talk!"

"Well, I'm sure I don't know. There's soup, and why not anything else? I shouldn't wonder, for my part, to see mutton chops. Here! young man!"

These words were addressed to a footman who passed, but did not hear the summons.

"Hi, waiter!" cried Mr. Gudge. "Hullo, you Sir; come here. Now, what do you want?"

"What is that, over there?" asked the lady, pointing to the table with her spoon.

"Charlotte des pommes," replied the man.

"No; not the lady," said Mrs. Gudge, as she whispered to her husband; "he might have said Miss, I think. That—there—by the foreign bottle."

"You couldn't get me such a thing as a glass of beer, could you?" interrupted Mr. Gudge, before the man replied; "and if there's a morsel of cheese to be had, I shouldn't care. I never sup without my cheese."

The last remark was addressed to a regular evening-party-man, who was feeding at his side. He stared over his mustachios at the speaker, but returned no answer. And at the same time Sir Frederick called away the attendant.

"Oh! of course not," said Mr. Gudge this time to himself, "we shall get nothing more. Well, after that, I think it's high time to be off. The most miserable evening I ever spent in all my life. I suppose I shall have to harness my horse next."

And without attending to any remonstrance, he seized his wife by the arm, as before, and elbowed his way through the densely-packed company, from the room.

During this time Mr. Skittler, who had been the delight of all the servants, until they were called away to their carriage duties, was getting ready the Taghioni ginger-beer waggon for his intended trip back to town. This was accomplished by simply leading the donkey from the field in which he had shut the entire equipage, and bringing it up to the gates, where the mass of gleaming carriage lamps shewed the number of vehicles that were in waiting. And when he had arrived very near to the door, he left Sprouts in charge of the concern, and went up to the house to look after his passengers.

There were many of the guests leaving; but Skittler did not see anything of Mrs. Hamper; so he thought the best plan would be to let her know by one of the domestics that he was in waiting. His conviviality in the servants'-hall had established a great intimacy between them all, and his wishes were immediately attended to. In a few minutes the lady made her appearance in the hall.

"My good man," said Mrs. Hamper, "there will be only myself going. A friend has offered to take my daughter in her carriage. Where shall I meet with you? For I do not wish to get into your vehicle just here."

"All right, mum," answered Skittler; "under the walnut tree there. A very respectable young gentleman as is in the law is taking care on it."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Hamper, as she stooped to pick up a pin,

and saw Mrs. Gudge's calash under the billiard table; "the very thing; I wonder whose it is. Does any body know?"

The question was asked in such a subdued tone that nobody replied, upon which Mrs. Hamper pulled the calash from its hiding-place, and when a sharp reconnoitre had shewn her that there were no servants who expected money at the door, she threw her whittle round her—which she had silently walked away with, whilst the lady's maid was looking for the ticketed cloaks and tippets of some of the provincial guests—and slipped round the door pillars. Her charioteer was on the look-out; and, with as much politeness as he could command, he assisted her into the vehicle.

"We've made it as jolly as we could, mum," said Skittler; "but we come off in such a hurry, we hadn't time to unload it. Them empty bottles will soon shake down comfortable; and I've moved the full ones to this end, because it's okkard when they go off and you're setting on them."

"Dear me!—well—I never did," exclaimed Mrs. Hamper, as she subsided, not without some little difficulty, upon the strange seat. "This is a beautiful calash—I wonder if it really belongs to anybody—I should not like them to see me. My good man, I hope the donkey is a good one, and quite safe."

"Oh! he's a regular firework, mum," said Skittler; "they feeds him altogether upon gunpowder and thistles to tickle him into a gallop. Go for ever, he will; and serve him right for being born at Marget."

"Hi!" shouted a coachman, on the box of a carriage that faced them, "where are you driving on! you can't pass here; you must turn back."

"Oh yes—I should say so," said Skittler; "I shouldn't wonder if you could turn your charret round the top of a oyster barrel; because, if you can, just get off and try and turn mine in this lane."

"You can't pass, I tell you," said the coachman; "the road's blocked up behind. You must fall into a line."

Sprouts, in the meantime, had run on to see how matters stood, and returned with the fact that it was as the man had stated.

"There's no danger, I hope," said Mrs. Hamper, anxiously, from within her calash; "had not I better get out?"

"No, mum; you're safest inside; I can pull into the ditch in a minute, if there's occasion," replied Skittler. "We'll see if we can't back."

"Good gracious, where are you going?" cried the lady, as the Taglioni waggon began to describe all sorts of queer figures on the road. "My good man—stop—I must get out—stop."

"It's all right, mum," replied Skittler; "only don't sit quite so backwards, for fear you should weigh the donkey up in the air. He's hardly balanced now; it's as much as his toes touches the ground. That's it—capital—that's it."

And with the assistance of Sprouts, the charioteer half lifted, half turned the equipage round, and brought it into the line of the other

carriages, with which it was obliged to go on, passing the very door in its turn. Here Mrs. Hamper pulled down the calash over her head until she looked almost like a perambulating bathing-machine : and after a little more shouting and exchange of salutations of various descriptions, they got clear off on to the road, and started off at an average donkey-power pace.

"How long shall we be getting back to town, my friend?" asked Mrs. Hamper, as soon as she thought that she could do so with safety.

"Well, mum ; it's impossible to say to an hour or two," replied Mr. Skittler, who was trotting with Sprouts at the side of the waggon. "You see donkeys isn't Christians, though this is next door to one—ay, nigher. He's sulky now, you see, mum ; he know'd the music, and thought it was a booth and we was going to stop for the night. I reckon they gets through a deal of ginger-beer at them great parties, mum."

"No—wine, usually, my good man," replied Mrs. Hamper, graciously, thinking it best to be on good terms with her escort.

"Indeed, mum," observed Skittler. "But you can't wonder at it, when you see what competition's done for ginger-beer ; it can't be made for the money : half a pint of froth in a fit, I calls it now. Them water-carts has knocked up the ginger-beer trade."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the passenger, imagining that her charioteer alluded to some strange way of distributing drinks gratuitously.

"They lays the dust so, mum ; and then people don't want to wash it down," explained the other. 'Skitty,' says Joe Tims, 'always pitch a ginger-beer cart in a parish where they quarrels about the rates ; and then the roads won't be never watered, and you'll sell no end.'"

"Is this your own conveyance?" asked Mrs. Hamper.

"No, mum : leastwise it's my pardner's. He sells the drinks and shell-fish, and I does the sandwiches and tators."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamper ; "sandwiches ! What are they made of?"

"Ham, we calls it, mum ; but we isn't partic'lar so long as the mustard makes 'em sneeze well. You can't lay on too much mustard ; they wouldn't have it unless it made 'em cry. And they don't mind toughness—not a bit—rather prefers it of the two ; because it lasts the longer."

Mrs. Hamper began to feel disinclined to carry on the conversation. But nevertheless Skittler continued :

"We takes different ends of the bridges, mum, in general ; for if any body has a sandwich at the Surrey side, he's sure to want some ginger-beer by the time he gets across ; but it's the salt, then. Come on !"

The last sentence was addressed to the donkey, and accompanied by a thwack with a stick that made him go sideways, like a dog, as far as the shafts would allow him to flinch, but did not greatly improve his speed. Donkeys and paving-stones are the only things that appear to require a simultaneous word and blow to produce an effect.

The lamps of Richmond got fewer and farther between as they left the town ; and they were now under the wall of Kew Gardens, along which the spectral fleet of whitewashed ships—now obliterated—were just discernible. For a suspicious appearance of daylight was coming up from the east. The fiery gleam in the air that had marked the position of London was fading into a cold grey ; and the horizon outlines were just defined. The morning air came tolerably cold ; so sharp indeed was it, that Mrs. Hamper bent the calash lower down than ever, and pulling the shawl over her head in addition, enclosed herself in a kind of tent, beneath which she was not long in falling into a doze—a real one, instead of the imitation she had intended to counterfeit at Kew bridge toll-bar. And then, as the occupancy of a donkey-cart is rather guided by what the wheels will bear than what the animal will draw, Skittles and Sprouts perched themselves on the side of the waggon, and in this manner the party proceeded onwards.

Two hours might have passed before Mrs. Hamper removed her envelope ; when she did there was no question about it's being broad morning. The shops and houses, to be sure, along the road were still closed ; and only from the baker's and inn chimnies was a light vapour rising into the clear sharp air. But the market carts and basket-people were on the road ; and heavy waggons loitered at the public-houses, whilst their horses, who had travelled through the night almost in a state of somnambulism, mumbled their chaff, and jingled their dull bells, or tossed their nosebags into the air, as they took their breakfast with their eyes shut. Now and then a dusty mud-splashed mail coach rattled by, evidently ashamed of being seen, hurrying on to hide in the inn yard, and snooze away under the shed, until the ostlers dragged it out to be washed and dressed. You could not see any of the passengers' faces, for they had apparently hidden them in their waistcoats. Their whole appearance told of cold and weariness—of roads across commons, on either side of which the fog hung heavily upon the gossamers that swung in grey festoons from heath to furze-bush—of stale coffee-rooms and slip-shod attendants, upon arriving.

There stood at this time upon the road Mr. Skittler was traversing, a public-house—one especially above all others—literally upon the road that now runs over its site. Its appearance assorted with its business : it had the air of an old, beery building, that would stand in every body's way, right out in the thoroughfare. There never was such a type of a house that had taken to drinking late in life as that one. It always looked seedy : in the day time especially so. Its windows were patched and pieced ; its roof ragged : its outhouses on the verge of tumbling down ; and everything about it that could move—spouts, curtains, shutter-hooks—had *delirium tremens*. All round it were strange doors, nailed up, that when open could have led nowhere ; broken lofts hung, rather than were built, in all sorts of dangerous corners, where nobody could get at them ; and in front of the house was a huge rusty padlock and chain fixed in the wall, fastening nothing to itself, for fear it should run away. There were always waggons about the crazy doors ; and they never appeared to come or to go. There

they always were; the horses grinding phantom hay for ever, and the drivers believing they were drinking beer; whilst spectral ostlers moved about the roofs of the sheds, which would have broken through with a cat; and shadowy forms could be seen within at the bar, drawing such liquors as Mephistophiles produced from the table. If ever any place was haunted, it was that old public-house at Knightsbridge.

But Skittler evidently believed in its materiality; for when Mrs. Hamper awoke to full consciousness, she found to her great horror that the Taglioni waggon was drawn up at the door, and that her companion had joined a knot of market-people who were drinking in the stable, apparently in the enjoyment of great hilarity for such an early period. And, to her increased discomfort, upon looking again, she found that the donkey had been removed from the waggon, which was kept up by the shafts being thrust into a hay-rack.

"What—what is all this?" cried Mrs. Hamper in accents of wild surprise, as she saw her position. "Here—man—you, fellow; what do you mean? Come here, and tell me directly."

"It's not my fault, mum," said Skittler, advancing towards her, with a pipe in his mouth. "We did the best we could, but the donkey was regular beat; he give in at Hammersmith, and there we left him."

"What?" cried Mrs. Hamper; "no animal to go on to town. Why have you placed me in this shameful predicament? Why did you say you could take me, when you could do no such thing?"

"We draw'd you on here, mum, ourselves," said Skittler, still smoking quietly; "and we'll draw you home. 'Twasn't our fault. The donkey wasn't in good case; I know'd how it would be if Joe took him to Marget. A animal like him can't live nowadays upon chalk and sea-weed, and that's all them sea-side donkeys get. We'll take you on, mum, in a jiffy."

"In a what?" said Mrs. Hamper. "No—I've had quite enough of this. You fellow—you!"

She was very energetic on the word "fellow;" in reply to which Skittler simply removed his pipe and touched his hat.

"What am I to do? Tell me this minute, you cheat—you imposing, badly-conducted man," continued Mrs. Hamper. "Here's a situation, if I should be seen by any of my friends. Come this instant—you—you common person—you and your low acquaintance there!"

"Come—I say," cried Sprouts, firing up suddenly, as it struck him that he was the person alluded to.

"Lay down," observed Skittler, "putting his friend back quietly on to a truss of straw. "We saw you into this here, mum, and we'll see you through it."

"Through it!" nervously exclaimed the lady, as she mistrusted the bottom of the waggon.

"Yes, mum: out of it—clean. Now, May-pole; bear ahead."

This epithet was addressed to Sprouts, who forgetting all indignation,

usually brought to a premature end when the indignation of the gentleman on the floor below was roused to a palpable pitch.

All sorts of people came and went. Sometimes elegant carriages stopped at St. Clement's pillars, to the discomfiture of the baked potatoes and toffee-stalls; and scented and jewelled ladies and gentlemen, for whom Turkey carpeting was usually too common, somehow or another contrived to climb up the creaking, knotty, rounded stairs to the chambers. These always wanted money desperately; and the dirty men who came on foot, with no gloves and grubby fingers, and looked like retired clothesmen, had always plenty to part with. Some came to know how they could crush their neighbours with the greatest safety to themselves; others, how they could retaliate or punish an imagined libel. But few came for any good, albeit Mr. Gudge turned them all to his own advantage; using them as so many lace bobbins, and entangling them all one with another inextricably, when he walked off with the produce.

The most constant visitor was a mildewy old man, who looked as if he usually lived in a cellar, where he subsisted on snuff and mushrooms, and only flourished in a fog out of doors. He was always so damp that in the sun or by the fire, he actually steamed like an old deed, and his hair was the mouldiest grey ever seen—that is to say about his temples, for he wore a small contrivance like a brown-worsted d'oyley on the top of his head, which had once assimilated in colour to his natural locks, but had not kept pace with them in their decay. He was a small author; and Mr. Gudge had bought him with a newspaper as its sub-editor; and when the weekly work was over, he made himself generally useful in other ways. He was connected also with two or three cheap periodicals: and always knew when they were getting into difficulties; upon which occasion he would give Mr. Gudge the earliest information, who directly bought them up if they were worth having, for legal affairs generally form the smallest portion of the subsistence of small attornies. Mr. Patch—that was his name—was held in great veneration by Sprouts, because he not only gave the clerk spoiled copies of different works he belonged to, but sometimes consulted him on the merits of an article. And one evening he brought a whole bundle of manuscripts to the chambers for perusal.

But Sprouts was not in a very collected state of mind that night, for Mr. Gudge, who wanted to get rid of him the next morning, had given him a holiday, and he was going out—with somebody, too, about whom he kept his notions to himself. He was also, upon the occasion, going to put on a tail-coat for the first time—a real tail-coat from the most fashionable shop in Holywell Street; and all the evening he was engaged in making the rest of his wardrobe worthy of it. Such employment of needles, thread, glue, ink, and sealing-wax had never before been witnessed. The hat was first wonderfully restored. Its fractures were reduced by splints of wood from the fire-bundles applied internally; and then its edges were darkened with ink.

"Ah!" exclaimed Sprouts, as he gazed at it with admiration. "Now if it would only rain jolly hard, wouldn't I go out; nothing sets old

things up like rain. They say putting them by for ever-so-long does the same. If ever I have anything to put by I'll try it. Now for the boots."

The boots required some contrivance.

"Always cracked in the same place," mused Sprouts; "on the little toe outside, just because it's most seen there. Why don't they go underneath, where it's of no consequence to anybody but the owner. Rather a tough job: I never could make out how the cobblers got inside a boot to mend it."

If necessity is the mother of invention, ingenuity has, without doubt, the strongest paternal claim. Sprouts surreptitiously dragged out Mr. Gudge's office coat from the deep drawer, and cut off a piece of the black lining, which he applied inside the boot.

"Capital!" he continued; "much better than making an ink barley-corn on the sock, because it shifts away in a long walk. Now, to-morrow, I'll fill this up outside with an accidental splash of mud, and then it will be splendid."

With like care did he remedy all the other defects of his costume, until he considered every thing was perfect, when he prepared to go to bed.

We have said that Sprouts's bed was a mystery—or rather a non-existence, that might have been classed with Mahomed's coffin, the North Pole, Britannia, the Holborn Turnstile, or any other received nonentity. He had for some time slept on the floor: but the combined influence of mice and draughts of cold air—both of which found plenty of room to come under the doors and fireplaces—had driven him to find another resting place. And this was an old bagatelle-board, which had come to the chambers when Mr. Gudge had taken possession of some ruined public-house; and which, on two stools and a chair, made a bedstead. It was not so comfortable at first, for it had an ugly habit of doubling up occasionally, to the great inconvenience of the occupant; but after a time it became more manageable, and then Sprouts slept upon it, as soundly as though it had been what conventionality thinks is a bed of down, and what reality knows to be a simple mattress. It was rather hard to be sure at first, but he soon became used to it, more especially when he had removed the red ball, which was firmly wedged into one of the holes, and generally caught him just at the shoulder-blade. The furniture was somewhat primitive; and a bundle of conveyances and indentures made his pillow. It was wonderful what a mass of villainy he contrived to sleep soundly upon.

But this evening he could not get to sleep at all; the very anticipation of his holiday made him restless. He turned round and stretched out as far as safety would allow; and at last lighted his candle, stuck it, by its own substance, on the back rail of his head chair, and dived after the last bundle of manuscripts that Mr. Patch had left with him. There were lots of old law-books as well, close at hand; but these, though useful in their way, become, like the proceedings of the statistical society, somewhat tedious when taken up for mere light pastime.

There were many contributions in the roll of copy. Nicely-written "thoughts" on all sorts of things from pebbles to sick-children, penned on both sides of the paper, from amateurs, who would gladly have paid what the literary men received, for the publication of these articles, rather than not appear in print; "impromptus" that had cost many an hour in arranging and correcting; stories of London in the middle ages, teeming with such phrases as "Olde Chepe," and "gramercy, fair sir! now by my halidame shall my rapier of Milan steel quit thee of this saucy varlet," and "Marry, come up, beshrew thee. Go to, forsooth," which ought only to be used in clever plays. For then the writer will be straightway said to inherit the mantle of the fine old dramatists.

At last a paper caught the eye of Sprouts, written in what is not always an unavailable style—on odd scraps of paper, the backs of letters and playbills, and fly-leaves of books—in a wild, reckless hand, blotted, and scored out, and interlined in a manner that not even the printers—leave alone the writer himself—could decypher without some difficulty. He, however, fixed upon this, from its very appearance, and read the following paper:

The Two Graves.

There live not those who have not shuddered at the ghastly mockery of a funeral.

The dreary scene has been performed in every home with all its tawdry appliances—its miserable impositions when the spirits are too crushed to challenge them—its fearful approach to a mere theatrical pageant wherein dresses are put on for the nonce, and footsteps are measured to order—its dismal craving for the display of connection, and extension of the Long Acre mourning that is to follow; that repulsive empty-carriage respect, so bitterly emblematical, which shrinks from damp turf and earthy odour: from planks, and chafing cords, and pressing crowds: but puts a hatband on the servants, and sends them to be present, as it would to the last appearance of some poor player to watch the farewell—patronized but uncared for. And this mourning of varnish, and hammer cloth, and harness is on the brink of the grave; literally on its brink; wherein all the world of some—whose lightest breath of restored life would, in the balance of the heart, far outweigh the wretched parade of gold that tags after it—is to decay.

Perhaps in the country this is less fearful; although the mockery still hovers about the ceremony. But the respect is universal, and in the quiet church-yard are gathered together all who might have depended upon each other for existence—the cemetery of one large family. The links of love and life are not so rudely broken. The memory of the dead is still fresh in the hearts of all who pass their graves; and even if affection prompts no other thoughts beyond one of simple recollection—one lingering remembrance of them as they lived—it is a kind one. A quiet home is the churchyard, then, in which the broken family may once more be united, when the holy wish of

turning to kindred earth in one's own land can be fulfilled. The very knell has not the freezing iron sound that vibrates above the turmoil of a great city. It is the mourning voice of an old friend, familiar in life, that chanted the requiem of the parents as it now welcomes the child to the still dark repose of the grave. But in London it is terrible.

She died : and I was left alive—and alone ! I had known for months that such would sooner or later be ; that the world was gradually withdrawing from me—hopelessly, surely—to leave but a black gulf yawning at my feet. I could not at first believe in misery so great. And yet, when the dark truth overwhelmed me, I sometimes wondered that I was not more utterly crushed. But when the time drew near for her departure, and I forced myself each minute to think that what I loved so dearly would soon be gone—remembered, if memory could break through such utter woe, only as a thing that once was, instead of communing with my every thought, as though we had but one being—I clung to her, and wrung her to my heart, as if I would have madly fought with the destroying angel, and opposed by weak, idle, mortal power to his—hour by hour, breath by breath.

Ours were no common ties. She had thrown up all on earth for me, that I might become another world to which her life could grow. And to me she was a dearer self : I knew this whilst she lived : her influence unconsciously directed every occupation I was engaged in ; and when at times I was chafed and wincing at some slight that conventional usage directed against us from our position, she would look at me, with her fair mild face, and remind me that she—who ought to feel it more deeply—was unmoved, as long as I was not influenced in my love for her, by the annoyance. But I did not know the boundless sway she held upon my being until she was gone. For then I found that there was not a single thought—not the most humble, trivial, idea or object—that was not connected with her memory, or with mute yet powerful eloquence spoke of her and of her affection. I know that we were shunned—pointed at—sneered at ; that cruel things were done towards us, purposely and unprovoked ; that our hearts were at times scored by insults we could not resent. Perhaps we deserved all this : I cannot tell : nor dare I say that such was uncalled for, for we had ourselves first tacitly thrown the gauntlet to society. But if the fault was great, the punishment was one of bitter agony ; it must have been expiated tenfold.

I recollect every period of the dark week that followed her death so vividly—every second so teemed with powerful, crowded sensations—that I would not attempt to recall it here. At first I was stunned ; so blunted, as it were, to the truth that I believed I was going mad. Several of my acquaintances that I had not met for years called and proffered assistance ; but I recoiled from and insulted them, as I thought it was only because she was dead that they had once more stooped to see me. And then came on the terrible reaction of the first blow. I could not leave the room : I was there all day—throughout the night—and all next day again, reckoning the time that we still had to be together, as a criminal counts his last hours on earth. My

head was bursting with my agony. I cried until the tears refused to come from my burning eyes—until one day I was found by the people lying senseless on the floor.

Then came the funeral with its cold hideous pageantry. One or two friends who had kept to us through all our trials accompanied me. Oh, God! how fearfully distinct is every proceeding of that dark day. I remember the heavy muffled noise as the bearers went down stairs, which the others endeavoured to keep from me by their unnoticed conversation; the ghastly journey, through the streets, with common life in full activity about us; the utter isolation of my misery in the midst of the noise, and even merriment. Yet great and overwhelming as was this agony, I remember that I put myself out of the way to tread only upon the black stones of the chequered church pavement, as we entered; that I noticed my cloak was too long for me, and wondered who had worn it last. I can even now call to mind the faces of the mob who poured into the burial-ground and leapt over the tombstones at our side as they hurried on to the grave, and made festivity of the ceremony. Then the foul dank earth was cast upon the coffin; and they led me forward to look down upon the dark bed in which she was asleep, for the last time. The last time!

They had told me that after the funeral my spirits would be more composed. But they could not have thought upon the desolation that awaited me on my return; for it was not until then that I found how utterly alone I was—how every thing about, which her sweet countenance had once lighted by its breathing radiance, became black and cheerless memorials of her departure. One of my oldest friends staid with me that night, and slept by me, in my strange room. I was so completely prostrated that I fell into a stupor, rather than sleep, for an hour or two. But I awoke in the black night, and thought of her in the churchyard: and it was cold, and raining heavily.

A day or two passed on, but I did not sleep again. I was not restless as I had been when worldly affairs had annoyed me; but I lay awake in bed, night after night, quivering with my great sorrow—wishing that the first dull grey of morning would appear at the window; and when it came, longing for night and darkness once more. Again I thought—with hope—that I might go mad—that the cord too acutely stretched would snap, and that I might be happy in my idiocy. Then I lost all confidence in Heaven. I hid my burning face upon my lonely heated pillow and prayed to die. And lastly the dark resolve came upon me, that I would myself seize the boon so grudgingly withheld.

It was a miserable evening when I left my dwelling—it was no longer home—as I trusted for the last time; never to return there but perhaps, as chance might ordain, cold and dead. The lamps burnt with a lurid halo in the red mist, through which the gaunt forms of the footpeople were moving like phantoms. I could not help fancying as I threaded the various streets that I was observed; and that people were tracking me. I did not even call to mind how in a great city, life and death walked hand in hand together unnoticed and uncared for. And yet even at this terrible crisis, the same strange perception of trifling

matters was as strong as when I was at the funeral. Have we two opposing states of mind, which, independent of all volition, delight in counteracting one another? I noticed the people in the shops providing for the next day; and vacantly read the placards of two or three lighted theatres that I passed, the doors of which were thronged with careless laughing crowds. And then I came down the steps to the edge of the river.

There it ran before me—dark, cold, gurgling: reflecting the light upon its bank in outstretched, quivering lines, now and then crossed by the form of some black hulk floating with its tide. It was not the time that the broken spirits choose to seek a resting place in its gloomy bed. The bridge was crowded with passengers: sounds of traffic rose in every direction; and the dusty glare of life hung over the roofs and spires of the city.

I did not quail, or hesitate; I looked upon the black water as a haven for the wreck I had become: and with a last glance at the world as I turned my sunken bloodshot eyes towards the banks, I threw myself in.

The cold water roared and bubbled by my ears as I sank. I had been an expert swimmer; and strange to say, my first impulse was to strike out and reach the surface. But my arms appeared paralyzed. I came to the top, nevertheless, and have some wild recollection of the whirling lights above me, and a momentary flashing shout of human voices; and then I sank again, and I knew that the tide was impelling me, grating against the bottom. I had but one thought at that moment, and that was, "It will soon be over."

And next I remember that I struggled for air. The feeling that I had been accustomed to, in a prolonged dive, of holding the breath became painfully intense; my temples appeared bursting; and my chest as if it was being gradually crushed by a heavy weight. Then my brain began to throb as though it would have broken from its tene-ment, and my ideas became confused. I remember little more than feeling as a drunken man might do when he closed his eyes to go to rest. I have a faint notion of brilliant lights, and a heavenly unknown calm; and being borne along by invisible agency as though I floated on the air. After this, all was night, and darkness, and oblivion.

In the envelop that contained the MSS. there was a note from the chaplain of a central metropolitan hospital. It stated that the writer of the paper had been sent to their asylum by the Humane Society—one of their district surgeons having restored him to life after his recovery from the river on the night in question. It mentioned, also, that during his patient's convalescence he had busied himself with writing the narrative enclosed; in spite of every recommendation to the contrary, by the medical attendants, who feared the effect of such excitement upon his overwrought constitution. And finally, it told that he had died.

suddenly from the outburst of a blood-vessel in the lungs, whose more delicate fibres it was presumed had been ruptured in the process of re-animation—that the body had been unclaimed, and given over to the schools for dissection.

The bit of candle had burned to its end just as Sprouts read to the conclusion of the paper, and the wick tumbled over and went out with a suddenness that quite frightened him. But the reading had somewhat composed him for sleep, so he turned carefully round, and before long forgot every thing and everybody, but one especial person he dreamt of.

Morning came, bright and sunny, and with it the holiday. Sprouts woke at daybreak, and having spent a few minutes in collecting his ideas and wondering how the flies could walk topsy-turvy on the ceiling, he proceeded to dress. And very gallant at last did he turn out—so imposing that a shout of approbation greeted him when he arrived at his usual club at Clement's Inn Pillars, and had a light breakfast of pickled wilks for a penny.

The boys are all there, lively and in great force; and immediately inquired of him what sum he felt disposed to part with his tails for, without their appendages. For the coat was directly observed.

"Now, young Monnymment!" cried a free-school urchin who caught the side-kick which Sprouts aimed at the company generally; "when are you going to be split up into ladders?"

"Mind the moon, daddy-long-legs, that's all," observed another.

"Ullow, tails!" called out a third, as he tugged Sprouts' novel additions, with a twitch that nearly jerked a wilk, shell and all down his throat. This gave rise to a chase in and out the pillars, which terminated by Sprouts dodging round at an uncomfortable moment, against a policeman, off whom he made a cannon, and went into a milk-pail.

"Take him up, Inspector," shouted the aggressor in the first instance.

"I saw him do it, Sir," said another, repeating the unprincipled observations of the clown in similar circumstances.

"Hit him hard; he's got no friends," cried a small five-year-old in an apron and shirt-sleeves.

A drunken bricklayer fortunately diverted the attention of the boys at this minute; and they all scampered off huzzaing to enjoy their next victim. Sprouts took advantage of this, and strode over to Waterloo Bridge, where deeming it necessary to support his character of a man, in his tails, he ventured upon some pleasantries with the austere toll-keeper, which he would otherwise never have dreamt of—such as asking him whether he could change a fifty pound cheque upon Millbank, as he wanted some half-pence; and whether he would take the toll then or toss for it; with other such queries, which had the effect of making the toll-keeper even more fearful in aspect than usual; especially when Sprouts gave the turnstile a twist, that sent it round spinning and clicking for five minutes after he had passed.

Waterloo Road may rank with those remarkably airy thoroughfares, such as Baker Street, Portland Place, and the like, which you never can see the end of, but may finish, for aught you can tell at the beginning, in some distant part of England. It is well ventilated, too, by the wind, which rushes up frightful chasms from unknown depths, and through the gratings in the pavement. Its atmosphere is as light and rarefied as the housekeeping of its inhabitants, by reason of its elevation. For its houses are all cellars—stories under stories of cellars—the lowest of which no eye may fathom, but which terminate in subterraneous regions, inhabited only by dray-horses, and lumbering wains, and burly coalheavers. The commerce of Waterloo Road is limited: judging from the shop windows, it appears chiefly confined to bonnet-shapes, play-bills, and pale dry cigars. But as the inspection of the windows involves a dizzy journey over the deep chasms above mentioned, which the boldest hearts quail at, the merchants are perhaps careless in the display of their wares.

Sprouts marched on, and at last stopped at a little tenement with a brass plate on the door, and a Dutch doll fashionably dressed in fly-spotted pink silver paper in the window, flanked by two coloured plates of morning and evening dresses; and there he gave a knock, something like a single one that had forgotten itself. There was a rapid spasm of the green blind, and a smiling face nodded through it; and then the street door was opened and Sprouts entered.

"Now, Tom! don't! oh my goodness!" was the exclamation heard between shutting the street door and opening the parlour one. What it related to I don't know, but a merry laugh that followed proved that it was nothing uncomfortable. And then Sprouts went into the room.

It was a milliner's, and the young person who was working at the table was the "Miss Twits" of the door-plate. The other, who had opened the door to the visitor was Miss Paine. Sprouts called her Bessy.

Bessy Paine was very pretty: a great many of the young ladies whose dresses she fitted on would have given them all and a great deal more, for her face and figure. She had a nice oval head and such blue eyes: as if they had a whole heaven of summer sky within them. Her hair was light, and smooth, and very glossy; and she had two red lips—very red just now—that made her mouth something like the bow given to Cupid in valentines, the upper one being short, and just gracefully lifted up, to show the row of polished teeth behind them. And as for her figure—there were so many lines of beauty in all directions, that an artist would never have wearied of looking at them. Nor an ordinary observer either, for the matter of that.

"I had quite given you up, Tom," said Bessy—I don't think she had though; but that is between ourselves, "Five minutes past," she continued, as she looked at a gouty old watch, who kept time in a fortress of pasteboard peppered with grits, on the mantel-piece; "and they start at the quarter."

"Oh! they wouldn't go without us, Bessy," replied Sprouts; "we're

the quality. But I say, you havn't observed—eh?—isn't that nothing?"

Whereon, with some difficulty Sprouts pointed out where the pockets of his coat were placed, and thrusting his hands in, stuck them out behind him like the tail of a bird, as he performed a pirouette.

"Oh, goodness alive! a real tail coat," cried Bessy, clapping her hands and laughing most wickedly. "Look, Letty; look at Tom in a real tail coat. Turn round again, Tom; now the other way. Letty: *do* look!"

Upon which Miss Twits—who had once been disappointed in love, having kept company with a young man who made his last appearance on the occasion of borrowing a sovereign of her and was never heard of again—raised her eyes, and smiled with melancholy satisfaction at the glee of her young companion. And then she told them with a sigh, "that they ought to enjoy themselves whilst they could—as she did once."

"Why, Letty—you're not five-and-twenty;" said Bessy Paine, who was making curtsies of mock respect to Sprouts.

"Nay, dearest: not in years," replied Miss Twits, who read penny romances in bed, and believed in the blighted hearts of the minor theatres: "not in years"—she was particular about that—"but in trials—ah!"

And with a sigh she bent down her head, and impaled a mother-of-pearl button on her needle, and thought it an emblem of her heart.

"Come, Tom," said Bessy Paine, "we must be off. And Letty—don't forget—you know."

Bessy went close to Miss Twits, and whispered a single word in her ear. But it appeared to be sufficient: and then she popped on an artful little bonnet, and asked Miss Twits to pull her straight; and seizing Tom's arm, dragged him with a half-walking, half-dancing step, into the street, along which they now proceeded, Bessy's spirits being raised to their highest pitch by Sprouts's declaration that he was as jolly as all the bricks collectively that formed the dwellings on either side of the way. And so they started, turning up one street, and crossing another, until they came to the trysting place.

This was the shop of a general dealer, who, taking the coal and potatoe line as the foundation of his enterprise, gave a pleasing variety to his speculations, by trading in whatever else was offered him for sale, or likely to find buyers. He evidently placed great reliance on human credulity, and appeared to live in a state of constant admiration of himself and wares. For he had red placards in his windows that commenced, "Look!": and others, "Halloo!": and others, "A penny for three pounds of bones!!!"—a startling announcement, intended to knock over the reader altogether. And in another pane he had displayed, "Now's your time: rags! rags!! rags!!!" and cartoons of old gentlemen bowing politely as they presented you with a scroll on which you read the cheering fact that most money was given there for bottles. And indeed many of the windows were

filled with them, pointing their mouths to the public like so many discharged pieces of artillery that had been directed and let off against as many diseases.

The van for Hampton Court, in which Sprouts was going, was to start from this shop. It was already there, and half filled with its passengers, who talked to everybody as they entered, as though they had known them for years: and quite right and comfortable too. They were all very merry, except one woman with a turn-up nose, and a shot-silk bonnet, who looked cross at everybody as they got in, and was especially careful of her dress, and evidently did not meet with the attention she expected, and made savage faces at the children, when their mothers' heads were turned. And at Bessy Paine, who was so disgracefully pretty, she looked especially angry: and evidently thought that the little milliner was no better than she should be. But as it is something in this world merely to be as good as we ought to be, without improving on that state of rectitude, Bessy held a very good second rank after all.

The party was soon completed: a van-party is usually punctual; indeed, some of them had taken their seats before the horses were put to. And then the general-dealer became frightfully excited: and bolted in and out of the shop after nothing, and gave useless commands to the driver, and cuffed the boys who had collected to cheer off the company. At last the steps were taken away, the passengers were pegged in securely, and as the gentleman in the linen jacket, who sat by the driver, blew an old horn, the expedition started, to the delight of the spectators.

"Fine morning, Sir," said a jolly-faced man, who sat opposite to Sprouts. "The rain keeps off."

Sprouts looked at the roof of the van—he could not see much else—and said he thought it did.

"Play the horn, Sir?" continued their fellow-passenger. "No? More do I. It don't look difficult though; makes a good noise; very filling at the price. Hey day! no harm done; pick up the pieces, and on we goes again."

The jolly-faced man evidently could not keep quiet upon any occasion. His last words had been provoked by the van jolting over a crossing. Next he produced a flat, green bottle, similar to those we have seen, when very little babies have had to be taken a long journey without their mothers. And this he applied to his lips, and then wiped the neck with his cuff, and offered it to Sprouts.

"Do, Sir," he said, "it'll do you good. Mild as milk, and twice as nourishing. Perhaps your good lady will?"

There was a joke!—Sprouts heard Bessy called his good lady! The tail-coat had evidently done that.

"Very good," he continued, as Bessy politely declined. "Perhaps you will, coming back, when it gets cold—eh?} May I offer you a little, marm?" and here he addressed himself to the cross lady, who made a face, suffered from several internal convulsions, and then put one of the curtains on one side, as though for air.

"Never mind, marm," said the jolly man, "no offence, I hope. I loves the ladies: hang the man that don't love the ladies. Don't you think so, Sir?"

"I should think I did," answered Sprouts, as he gave Bessy's arm an amicable pinch.

"Ever been to Hampton Court, Sir?" asked the jolly man. "Curous place—*uncommon* curous to be sure: not overfurnished though: looks as if they'd cleared out all the rooms for a dance. Palaces and scenes at the play-house are just alike—no tables nor coal-scuttle: all on a floor, too. Every body must have had to go through everybody else's bedroom to get to their own—okkard for kings and queens that must have been. But I reckon they never go to bed at all."

"I can't tell," said Sprouts, "I've never known any to speak to."

"I've thought a good deal about kings and queens," said the jolly man, "and that's why I like to go to Hampton Court. Nobody but kings and queens could ever have lived there—I wouldn't, not for any money. I wonder how kings and queens do live though—whether they gets up and have breakfasts like we do, or are forced to eat what the ministers order. Should you like to be a queen?"

"I don't think I should," said Bessy, "I'm very happy as I am."

"Ah, happiness is the best politics, as the saying is," observed the jolly man, in a hazy recollection of some proverb; "and what else is to be done, you know, eh? what else is to be done?"

Sprouts did not exactly know, so he turned it off, showing Bessy various objects of interest on the road with which he was acquainted, and taking shots as to several others with which he was not, rather than appear ignorant.

"Oh my!" he suddenly exclaimed, with a sharpness that suggested that he had either sat upon a tin tack turned up, or been stung by a wasp.

"What's the matter?" asked Bessy, almost alarmed.

"Well, if my tails last night didn't quite drive it out of my head; and I've but just thought about it. I was to have given this to the governor."

As he spoke he pulled out the address of some river-side public house at Wapping:

"There's a man staying there," continued Sprouts. "that old Gudge wants to get hold of; and I was to have told the governor that the other had heard of some boy or another, and will be able to nail him as soon as he's wanted. Well—I shan't make myself miserable; it must keep, that's all."

And as the horn in front played a popular air, Sprouts dispelled his grief by singing an accompaniment.

CHAPTER X.

THE "RING O' BELLS" AT BIDSTON.

THE calm and soothing twilight of spring eventide was gliding slowly onward upon the earth as Hickory led the donkey, upon which Christopher was seated, along a rude bridle-way towards the last halt he intended to make on their journey.

They were travelling along a bold headland, on the ridge of which their path lay. Hitherto they had gone for some little distance over broken ground, encumbered with huge blocks of stone, and dug into deep quarries and pits that it required some little caution to avoid in the failing light; but now they had arrived at a beaten track, and all was smooth before them. It was not yet so dark that Christopher could not observe the extensive panorama around him, although the horizon was already veiled in shade. But his attention was principally attracted by a swarm of lights that he was looking down upon on his right, the like of which he had never before witnessed.

They rose, bright and twinkling, even in the last gleam of day, one above the other, until the most distant and the faintest appeared to mingle with the peeping stars that one by one were coming out in the blue air. Their reflection gleamed and quivered in a great water that flowed between them and the headland; and they spangled the banks in long array, until they got so hazy at the far-off points, that they only caught the eye at intervals. But they were not all stationary. Upon the shore, and on the water, they moved along, crossing and re-crossing one another, and mixing with the general mass, until all appeared to be endowed with bewildering motion.

"That's a larger mine than we've got," said Christopher, as he looked in wonderment at the illumination, his only idea of a number of lights being connected with the working of the miners.

"It isn't a mine," replied Hickory, "as you shall see to-morrow. That's a great town, and those are the lamps. It's Liverpool."

As far as Christopher's knowledge was concerned, it might have been Kamschatka. But the sight was so riveting that he could not take his eyes from it, scarcely even to notice the lighthouse under whose very walls they passed, with its array of signal masts that looked as if somebody was either preparing a great display of fireworks, or making ready to set sails and carry the entire hill, lighthouse, telegraph and all, out to sea, upon the first fair wind.

"That's a curious thing," said Hickory, as he pointed to the telegraph. "I've heard there's people can read that gibbet just like a book. I never could, not to speak of. I've made out a F, and a L, and a E without the middle; and sometimes they was upsy-down. And once I saw it trying uncommon hard to turn itself into a H, but it wasn't much of a go, not to speak of."

Whilst he was talking, he led the donkey from the ridge, and they

descended towards a small nest of houses, as the hill shut out the expanse of view and the cluster of lights that had fixed Christopher's attention. Hickory's spirits seemed to rise as he got lower : mercurial, indeed, in their property. He sang so many snatches of songs, running one into the other with such wilful carelessness, that the brave old oak was getting up stairs on the banks of Allan water, and prevailing upon somebody to drink to him only with their eyes as he struck the light guitar all the day in the Bay of Biscay and allowed the bumper's toast to go round ; and no one could have decided which air was his especial favourite. Nor did he stop until he arrived at the entrance of the hamlet.

It was a little, quiet, grey village—so very grey, indeed, and venerable, and quaint, that no flaunting red brick had dared to shew itself and break the uniform tint of its gabled antiquity. The houses were grey, and the wall-fences were grey, and so was the church tower. So also was the pedestal of the sun-dial in the grave-yard, that mutely spoke its lesson on corroding time to all who cared to heed it. And the old grange, with its mullioned windows and ivy-covered gateway, was the greyest of all : there was scarcely any surmising as to when it had been a green damp level young house. None could have given the information but the church tower : and when that spoke, it was but of the newly past, the fleeting present, or the call to the future Heaven.

Hickory led his little companion by the church, and at last they stopped at a small hostel, with which he seemed to be well acquainted. There was yet light enough for the sign to attract Christopher's attention. It represented a party of industrious individuals, one of whom was as grey as the village, performing certain of those triple-bob complications with ropes and bells, the achievement of which we at times read of in the newspapers, with as clear a notion of what task has been surmounted as though the chief actors in it had squared the circle, boxed the compass backwards, composed a fugue, or tried to pull down our sublimest creed to a peppery squabble of ecclesiastical stonework and linen-drapery.

And on the other side was quite a different picture. There was the lighthouse they had passed ; and all the firework poles, and a windmill ; and two huntsmen going up-hill like mad ; and one more, who was not going to be beaten at any price, coming in at the side ; and the fox at the top ; all very exciting to behold, but withal calculated to confuse the mind of the casual traveller, as to the exact simple sign to be made out from all this pictorial display. It did not, however, perplex Hickory.

"Whoa !" he cried, as he halted at the door. "Here's the Ring o' Bells at Bidston, and here we'll put up for to-night. And there's the old tree t'other side, not cut down yet ; not a leaf on him though ; looks as if he was growing with his roots upards. Are you tired, Christy ?"

"I'm very hungry," replied the little boy.

"Ah ! hunger's the best sauce," observed Hickory, "that's what makes the boys so impudent. Look there—can you read what's over the door ? There's just light enough."

"S—I—Simon Croft," said Christopher, staring at the board.

"No—no—the poetry," continued Hickory; "that's first rate, mind you. Listen now: 'Walk in my friends'—that's you and I, you know; anybody, as the saying is; all his friends—'and taste my beer and liquor; if your pockets be well stored you'll find it come the quicker.' Very good—now go on from 'quicker.'"

"'But for want of that,' read Christopher, 'has c—a—u—'"

"'Has caused both grief and sorrow,' continued Hickory. 'Therefore you must pay to-day, I will trust to-morrow.' Beautiful! how I should like to sing it.'"

And he commenced putting the words to music of his own, when the landlord appeared at the door.

"Here we is, master," said Hickory, who appeared to know the house. "Just a singing your poetry. You has precious few bad debts, I should think, after that."

"Middlingish, as times go, Hickory," said the landlord. "And how do you find yourself?"

"Oh, I find myself in nothink except my clothes," replied the other, "but you needn't be afraid. We've done capital. 'Pay to-day, I will trust to-morrow,'" he continued, reading and singing. "Ah! that does good, depend upon it; frightens 'em, eh?"

The landlord smiled as he took Christopher from the donkey, and put him on the ground; and wished it always did.

"It does, 'pend upon it," continued Hickory; "anything like reading does always. When we was at Stratford and Avon we saw a tombstone there of a gent—one of us perffessionals—who's buried there; thinks a good deal of him too they does. And he's put on his tombstone as he wouldn't have his orts meddled with on no account. They've never done it neither; no, not all the body-snatchers nor doctors in London, nor Guys, nor anywheres. Bide there now."

He hung the halter of the donkey over the rails; but there was not much fear of his running away; and then taking Christopher by the hand, led him into the house, in the common room of which several people had assembled.

"Service to everybody," said Hickory, as he made a low bow in return for the attention his appearance excited. "How d'ye do, mum?" he added to the landlady.

"Well, Mr. Hickory," returned the hostess, "are you come back again?"

"Yes, mum: here we is; like rats and poors-rates, no getting rid of us, as the saying is."

"Have you done well this last trip, Mr. Hickory?" inquired the hostess.

"We can't disactly grumble, mum. When we got enough to drink, we drank it; and when we didn't, we went without. We've not had reglar fair play though."

"No! Mr. Hickory?"

"No, mum. It's painful to think about, but poor Luddy's gitting past his work. He does look uncommon sad for a merriman, to be sure. And the more he paints hisself, the sadder he looks—that's the

worst of it. He tried to bring up his mouth into a laugh with wermillon, but it was no go ; it dropped into a horseshoe sort of a shape directly."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Croft, with a slight sigh of interest.

"And his wind ain't of no account neither," continued Hickory, "for the Pandæans. There's more of the drum than the pipes in all his music ; and as I say, you can't give a good notion of a tune not on a drum alone."

"We must all get old, Mr. Hickory," said the landlady.

"Yes, mum, we must. It's a complaint that don't seem to trouble you much though."

The landlady looked so pleasant !

"But it troubles Luddy," continued Hickory. "I wish the government would buy a theaytre, as a sort of paddock for old clowns where they could be found with fire and candles, and have all their larks amongst themselves, and offer one another their tuppences for the goodwill of firework-makers' shops and such like, and steal whatever they pleased, without being obliged to jump through windows and down coffee-mills out of the way afterwards. And how have you been, mum—busy?"

"Pretty well, since summer began, as you may see," replied Mrs. Croft, pointing to some hams that hung from the rafters of the quaint, old low-roofed room.

It should be mentioned that the summer season is not so dependant upon the Almanac at Bidston, as upon Good Friday ; on which day it commences, whatever the state of the weather-glass. And with it begins also the consumption of ham and eggs at the "Ring o' Bells" in mighty quantities ; you would have bad luck through the year if you did not eat of both to something beyond repletion on that day, in the more or less Elizabethan parlour of the hostel. And the hams form a sort of zodiac round the room, by the state of which you may calculate upon the progress of the season. Comfortable they look, too, in their canvass bags ; and pleasant are the visions of crisp cupped rashers, and rich yolks blushing through their milk-white jackets, that they conjure up.

During this conversation, Christopher had been inspecting the company, and was finally lost in admiration of the scroll-work chalked on the floor. But the mention of ham and eggs attracted him directly, and he looked from Hickory to the landlady with his large eyes, which told as plainly as eyes could speak, that he should have no objection to increase the consumption.

"Not your little boy, Mr. Hickory?" asked Mrs. Croft.

"Not as I knows on, mum," replied the traveller, "although there is something of a likeness to be sure."

Two or three of the guests laughed aloud, as they compared the features of the fair-haired child with Hickory's full-blown, weather-beaten visage.

"Ah—you may laugh, gents," said Hickory, winking ; "but it's the growing up as does it, and always by contrarey. Pretty babies always grows

up ugly, and ugly ones pretty. I was uncommon ugly when I was a baby : and look at me now."

Here Hickory made a great fall in his back, and spun round in a comical fashion, finishing in an attitude, to the great delight of the lookers on.

"Well, he is a pretty little fellow, to be sure," said Mrs. Croft.

"Thankee, mum ; and the same to you and many on 'em," replied Hickory with a bow.

"No—not you," said the landlady smiling, "I mean the child. Come here, little man. What's your name?"

"Christopher Tadpole, please," answered the child.

A fellow, in a rough countryman's dress, had been smoking at the fire-place with his head half up the chimney—evidently from habit, as the grate was now filled with flowers—but as he heard the boy give his name, he turned quickly round and fixed his eyes on him so earnestly, that as soon as Christopher caught the glance, he was almost frightened.

"Do you know the Westland mine, young 'un?" he asked. "I think you do—eh?"

The little fellow looked first at Hickory and then at the man, evidently in some fear. But he did not answer ; he only shuffled up to the landlady.

"You needn't hide your head," continued the man, rising. "Let's have a look at you."

And he took the child by the arms, and hoisted him on to the table.

"You couldn't tell a bit of salt if you saw it now, I'll be bound," said the man.

"Yes, I could," answered Christopher ; "that's a bit."

And he eagerly pulled all that remained of the chrystal from his pocket, and shewed it to the others.

"So it is," said the man, going back to his settle. "That'll do ; it's all right."

"Well ; that's a matter of opinion," observed Hickory, who had been looking on somewhat amazed during the dialogue ; "it don't seem to me as if it was. What do you know about this boy?"

"Nothink," surlily returned the man. "What do you?"

"Not quite so much," said Hickory. And then he looked round pleasantly at the company, feeling it necessary to re-establish the confidence that these questions might have shaken ; and not at all anxious that Christopher should in any way be reclaimed or acknowledged, from the attraction he proved in the travelling company. But his mind was soon relieved. The man knocked the ashes out of his pipe upon the hob, and then got up to leave, quieting, by sundry cuffs, the restless movements of some animals who were jostling in his pockets, from which the head of a rabbit occasionally thrust itself as he went out.

Hickory ordered some supper, as soon as he was gone ; and then producing a pack of cards proceeded to delude the company with various cunning performances, changing spades into diamonds, and

making knaves turn up where they were never suspected to be, and pronouncing complicated words—not to say utterly incomprehensible—which literally set Christopher aghast, and made him handle every card as though he expected it to go off. But all this increased the admiration of Hickory to the highest pitch.

"Now, gents; encourage the performance if you please," said the artist when he arrived at a becoming point of the entertainment. "We're not above copper, but take silver whenever we can get it; so don't be afraid of offending us. Now, gents!"

He rattled a box as he spoke, in which two decoy bad half-crowns had long resided, and went round to the people, who were not backward in contributing humble sums.

"Thank you, Sir," said Hickory; "the times is bad and wittles dear. I've been living for the last two months at Wolverhampton upon stewed curry-combs and tin-tack puddings, which ain't good for delicate stomachs."

"I should reckon not," said one of them with a laugh.

"Oh! bless you—that's nothing. I know a nailer as has brought up a small family upon screw-drivers and sand-paper. Digest anything, they can, in manufacturing towns. Now, gents!"

"Try them out of doors," said a spectator, pointing to the window. "Why should they see it for nothing?"

The moon had risen, and its light fell upon the old grey church, and streamed through the casement upon the fancifully ornamented stone floor of the inn. As Hickory looked towards the window, he saw two outline forms apparently gazing into the room; but the minute attention appeared to be directed to them, they retired.

"That's shirking," said Hickory; "never mind, I'll try it on."

He went out at the door, with the intent to ask them for their contribution; but it was only to see them passing down the lane quickly.

"Ah!" he said, as he returned, "they outsiders is never of much count, as I know at the fairs. The money-box frightens 'em all away like a gun does crows. Never mind; we can pay for what we has: and now for supper."

Christopher's eyes brightened at the sound. The word was given, and the eggs and ham were soon hissing on the fire in the kitchen, and then they fell to with appetites that almost made the rest of the company believe in the stories of manufacturing hunger that Hickory had been propagating. The dish was excellent, and the ale was something beyond that. Christopher drank out of a glass almost as tall as himself, until he laughed, and talked, and finally went to sleep on the floor in the corner of the room. Hickory kept the company together for a long time, with his songs and performances, until they insisted upon a second collection being made: and one enthusiastic gentleman declared he should come and stay a fortnight with him. There had not been so much ale drawn at the Ring o' Bells that year: not even on ham-thirsty Good Friday. So Mr. Croft said, and he was a man worthy of credence. But at last the party broke up, and Hickory and Christopher were lodged in a contiguous loft upon some fresh hay—a species of couch the exhibitor far preferred to the bed of domestic life.

And then the old grey village slumbered in the tranquil moonlight ; not a sound breaking its stilly repose except the low calling of the sea, whose murmurs lulled it into yet deeper quietude. The cold beams hung upon the ivied gateway of the manor, and lighted up the silent chancel of the church, as they marked unwonted hours in shadow upon the dial at the porch, and threw the branches of the dead tree into spectral relief against the deep blue sky. They bathed the gables with their silver flood, and twinkled in the small window panes of the inn : and a few rays stole between the tiles and fell upon Christopher, as he lay curled up asleep in a species of nest he had made in a truss of hay, too tired to dream either of his past existence or his future destiny.

CHAPTER XI.

CHRISTOPHER FALLS INTO BAD COMPANY.

MORNING came ; and the early sun shone through the chanted window, and into the loft, instead of appearing by proxy, as moonlight. The little boy was aroused by Hickory's voice, carolling like a lark, in the early day : and they were soon ready for breakfast. Hickory had made but little change in his toilet. The old soldier's coat and cocked hat were still carried, to be in readiness for any extempore performance that a promising locality might call forth : the donkey was led forth again ; and the travellers having had the satisfaction of hearing that their score had been wiped off by a subscription from the company on the preceding evening, once more were upon the road. They skirted the meadows they had crossed on the previous evening, and continued along a tolerably open country, until they came to a village which appeared inclined to stretch itself out like a polypus in all directions, to judge from the new houses rising about it—situated on the edge of a large river, the waves of which were dancing and flashing in the bright morning. Hickory left the donkey with an acquaintance ; and then with his young companion got on board a steamer that was roaring alongside the quay. A bell rung—the boat set off, and in two or three minutes they were landed on the opposite wharf, and Christopher was told that he was in Liverpool.

"Now, my man," said the traveller, "our first job will be to look after Luddy. He and his missus was to get round as they could, in a coaster, or by the canals, all amongst the Cheshire cheeses. I reckon I know where to pitch upon him. Now keep close to me."

There was no occasion for this order ; for Christopher was so confused with the bustle and novelty of the quay, that he clutched tight hold of Hickory's coat : and off they started on their search.

No wonder that the little boy was bewildered at the first sight of Liverpool. Older heads than his, whose eyes had stared at everything all over the world, might have been excused for a little dizziness under similar circumstances. Tough old mariners, who had spent their lives upon the ocean, could not have pictured the crowding and jostling there

would be, even upon the wide Atlantic, if all the ships took it into their figure-heads to be off together. Smoky warehousemen, who had passed years in the murky regions of Thames Street and the Tower, would have disbelieved in any trade that could keep all the cranes of the many-storied buildings in constant work. And people generally, of ordinary capacities, who had dined at Blackwall, and seen the Indiamen there lying, might have rubbed their eyes, and wondered if they had turned into multiplying glasses, or whether they were having some wonderful dream consequent upon the vinous properties of the white-bait they had been devouring, which, having at times a tendency, even in a waking state, to double the vessels in the sight of the beholder, might in a dream, without doubt, increase them fifty-fold.

Ships—ships—everywhere: crowding their lofty, quivering masts, and slender spars, and tense cordage in apparently inextricable complication. Ships, that had battled with the waters of dark and far distant seas in their wildest might: and now lay calmly, almost in the very streets; and gave up the treasures they had so bravely carried over the leaping wildernesses of the ocean to their masters. Ships, whose sweltering planks had been scorched beneath the blazing sun of strange lands since they last departed: whose rigging had strained and creaked, and yet held on, true and fast, against the anger of the storms: whose trusty bows had boldly met the lashing, maddened billows, flinging back their angry foam to the vast and boiling cauldrons of the deep, as their fettered timbers struck the hissing waters, bearing all the love, and hope, and world of hundreds within their span. Ships—still ships, and ships—on for miles!

They were the sources from which everything around arose—the lofty warehouses, and walls, and transit-sheds: the cranes, and oddly-fashioned carts, and solid waggons: the crowds of toil-worn, thoughtful men of business: of careless seamen, and lynx-eyed officers that thronged the quays: the mighty docks themselves that stretched so far along the shore, and could scarcely be said to finish anywhere. For beyond their actual limits others were still forming. Huge piles rose to divide the rushing current of the Mersey far out from its banks, and blocks of stone that appeared to defy all attempts to move them were lying about, on which the clinking chisels of the masons were plied incessantly. Frameworks of hugely-bolted timbers, too—on the edges of which strange machines apparently moved themselves and those they carried—reached out from the immature quays, all was as if the grasping hand of commerce found the earth too small for its operations; and wished to imprison the very water, hitherto free to come and go as it listed, in its service.

One had only to look upon the goods debarked under the sheds to see what wonderful journeys the ships had made. Strange logs of wood—of grain and colour unknown at home—were pitched down in heaps. Odd outlandish packages, too, were there, marked with mystic hieroglyphics, as if the artist had learned his alphabet from the bottles in chemists' windows, or the curious diagram—which some people pretend to understand—in Moore's Almanac. Further on were drums of figs, enough to have supplied all England with dessert for a year,

including Lord Mayor's Day, at which festival such unwonted numbers of dishes always figure in the long lists of eatables that everybody knows, but nobody reads—tight little band-boxes of seed-and-sugar-bags, seen singly at reputable grocers, but here stocked in piles that an ordinary sized man might not look over. Bales of matting like enormous first-born-baby pincushions; or rather, as such would appear in the Polytechnic microscope, when the ingenious gentleman who lives all amongst the oxy-hydrogen gas and dissolving views in his vivid sentry-box, shews you the triumph of nature over art as exhibited in the leaf and bit of cambric. Strange casks which might contain fish, or treacle, or pickles, or anything else a vivid imagination chose to fancy in them. Hides of supposed wild beasts, looking like diseased door-mats: skins of animals as unknown as the wondrous Liver—the bird from which the town takes its name, and who has never been seen except on the corporation seal, but is supposed, in the dark ages, to have paired off with the Dodo upon some interesting division of the globe generally. Everything lying about was odd, and new, and foreign. Even the carts that carried these things away were like none others in England: for they were very long—they would have done for large gangways at steam-boat piers—and had only two wheels, so that everything had to be balanced in them: and if this were not done, they threatened either to lift the horse up into the air, like a harnessed Pegasus, or press him to the ground beyond all chance of progression, except he had been trained at Astley's to approach a conquering King upon his knees.

Few shops diversified the lines of warehouses that rose along the road bordering the docks; and when they did, they were for the sale of articles of stern nautical use—ropes and sail-cloth, and tough biscuits: outlandish habits of oil-skin, optical instruments, and spirits. At the dock-gates were stalls of humbler merchandize—cheap braces and small mirrors—superannuated apples and results of unpromising confectionary. In this new world, Christopher had not eyesight enough to gaze in wonder on the novelties that burst upon him at every step. But for Hickory's guidance, he would long ago have tumbled amidst some of the piles of strange merchandize that rose everywhere right in the way of the passenger.

There was some particular dock at which Hickory expected to fall in with Luddy, and towards this they now bent their way. His quaint appearance excited some little surprise at first: but the people about were too well occupied with their own affairs to give much attention to him, and after the first glance they scarcely turned their heads.

He asked a few questions, and at last arrived nearly at the end of one of the sheds to which he had been directed, from the vessel wherein he found his partner had arrived. It was a landing-place for West-Indian produce; and everything about was sweet and sticky. There were hogsheads from which cloying syrup was oozing: and damp saccharine packages distilling very moist sugar from their interstices: and clammy boxes, and viscous casks, and glutinous baskets. Around the first of these, the boys had collected like flies, to be occasionally driven away, and then to return the next minute; not getting inside the

tubs, as we have seen them do at grocers, but discovering perfect treasures of sweets under the hoops and between the staves, which required great ingenuity to take possession of. It was at this spot, that Hickory found the thin clown, in his attire of private life, talking to a friend on board one of the ships; and leaving Christopher for a minute to himself, he advanced to the edge of the quay to speak to him.

The little fellow was at first somewhat timid at joining the other boys in their meal, although he felt inclined: for they were rough fierce-looking lads who gained their living at the dock side in any manner—they were not particular how. And when Christopher picked up a bit of stick, as he saw the others do, and got near one of the large tubs, they told him to sheer off because he wasn't wanted. He shrunk back, but was fortunate enough to see a hogshhead not yet besieged: and seating himself upon the ground by the side of this, began a repast, which would not have left a tooth in his head if it had been long continued, at least, if old pathologists are worth belief.

But it was suddenly interrupted. Half hidden from Hickory by the hogshhead and bales, he was sounding every cranny, like a bee for sweets, when a terrible apparition burst upon him. A ragged head and shoulders rose from behind a heap of goods on which a pair of huge bare muscular arms were next place; and in an instant, to his consternation, he recognized the form of Rockey—the man to whose brutality he had been subjected in the salt mine.

He could not stir or speak. The glaring eyes of the man fascinated him as a rattlesnake would have fixed a bird. His little stick rested in the last cell he had discovered, as he gazed, in speechless terror, at his persecutor's face, for nearly a minute. And then, still looking at him, he shrunk closer to the ground and commenced to crawl on his hands, away from the hogshhead.

"So—here you are," said the miner, in those rough tones which thrilled along the boy's every limb. "And what have you been doing with yourself all this time. Eh?"

Christopher made no reply: he was too frightened to utter a word. But he still kept dragging himself, on his hands, towards the side of the dock.

"Stay where you are;" exclaimed Rockey in a low, but still savage voice. "If you move I'll shoot you dead. Look here: do you know what that is?"

He presented a pistol to the child as he spoke, who immediately hid his face with his arm. He need not have been so alarmed, for the weapon was old and useless, and had no lock. But it had the same effect as though it had just been turned out of a gunmaker's, bright and oiled, and loaded with slugs to the muzzle.

In his agony of terror, Christopher could still hear Hickory's voice on the wharf, and the slightest cry would have reached him. But he did not dare to speak.

"Come out of that," said Rockey; "you must go with me you know. Not a word: get up I tell you, and come here."

The chances are that he would have obeyed, when an incident



Chenopodium, or, the, ...

occurred which for a minute or two produced a hope of rescue. The idle boys, to whom Hickory's quaint appearance presented a most tempting subject for their mischief, had been amusing themselves by pelting small bits of rubbish and wood at his cocked hat whilst he was talking to Luddy; when, one of them bolder than the rest, ventured behind him and tugged one of the long tails of his old soldier's coat, dodging off behind the packages immediately. Hickory turned sharply to pursue him, and darting round the hogshead nearly tumbled over Christopher who was still staring at Rockey. The miner crouched behind the bales, as the other came up, and Christopher, relieved from the stare of his eyes, sprung upon his feet and clung to one of Hickory's legs.

"Hold me tight," he cried: "hold me tight, or else he'll take me away."

"Hey day! what's up now?" asked Hickory. "Who'll take you away?"

"He's there," said the boy, nodding his head, for he would not leave go his hold of Hickory to point. "Rockey's there—behind the boxes."

"Yes—you're right enough," said the miner, coming forward and speaking, when he saw that he should be discovered. "Here I am—there's no mistake."

"Oh—there's no mistake, isn't there?" exclaimed Hickory. "Well—I'm glad of that. I don't think there's likely to be with anybody as has seen you once."

"Don't be too funny," said the miner; "perhaps you'll turn round presently. I want that boy."

"Do you now?" returned the other; "and it happens curiously enough that I want him too."

The child clung closer to Hickory as he spoke and was about to turn away, when Rockey continued:

"Pshaw! stow your chaff. I tell you I want the boy—*my* boy."

"*Your* boy!" said Hickory, looking first at Christopher's pale face and golden hair, and then at the swarthy ill-favoured countenance of the miner. "Well—*your* boy!—nobody wouldn't have believed it."

"Look here!" said the man pulling a dirty slip of paper from his pocket; "here's a certificate of his having run away from the works. Read that!"

The document was written in a fair business-like hand, and Hickory was obliged to persuade himself that it was authentic.

"Now," continued Rockey, "suppose I tell one of those good gentlemen there, in constables' clothes, that you stole him from the mine. Perhaps you haven't got a certificate handy to prove how you come by him. And the police are very kind you know; they'd take great care of you I dare say, 'till you found one."

Poor Hickory was somewhat puzzled. He began two or three speeches and broke down in all of them. The other directly saw his advantage.

"I don't want to do nothing but the right thing," he went on; "so look here. I'm staying at that public-house; you can see the

top of it over the dock-wall. I shall be there a day or two, with my boy; and if you can prove your right to him in that time, I'll give him up directly. Come—come along, Master Christopher."

"I won't go with him," screamed the child as he clung to Hickory. "I won't go. He'll take me underground ever so far, and kill me. I know he will."

"Come here!" said the miner savagely, as he wrenched the boy's hands from Hickory's garments, but not without some difficulty. "Come here!"

And he pulled Christopher away.

"Don't do that," said Hickory; "you're hurting of him. There go with him, Christopher—there's a man: and you shall come back, you know, quite soon."

"No!—I won't go with him," cried the child struggling. "He'll kill me, I tell you. Pray—pray—pray, let me stop here."

He went down upon his knees, and held up his small hands to Rockey as he spoke in the most piteous accents. The miner clutched him by the arms and pulled him up roughly.

"Hold your row!" he roared.

"Damn it all!" exclaimed Hickory; "nobody's flesh and blood can't stand this. Why, you outrageous, cut-throaty—"

"Another word, and I give you in charge for stealing this boy off from the salt-works," said Rockey, looking round, and perceiving that the scene was attracting the attention of some of the people in the docks, including Luddy, whose head rose over the coping of the wharf. "So," he continued, altering his tone, and striking the boy slightly with his hand, "you will keep playing here will you: eh? and you won't go on messages. Come home this minute—do. I'll teach you to be always idling out of doors."

And pretending to be chastising the boy for some trivial offence of loitering, he pulled him away from the other; through the dock-gate, and across the road to the public-house he had pointed out, leaving poor Hickory gazing after him, with all his ideas completely turned topsy-turvy by the position in which he found himself.

"Well," he said, as he turned towards Luddy, "I wish I'd been a lawyer just now: wouldn't I have brought a action. L, A, W, Law, that has such a deuce of a claw; if you're fond—pshaw! get out."

The last words were addressed to the tune he was humming, which had run into his head at the moment, quite against his will. But the song was not so readily disposed of. It would keep returning, and inquiring whether some imaginary bystander was partial to pure vexation and sweet procrastination; until he reached his partner and began to detail to him the scene that had just occurred.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH PRINCIPALLY CONCERNS SPROUTS AND BESSY PAYNE.

THE jolly man turned out a capital fellow for the van party ; and kept everybody alive, except the cross old lady.

She had evidently come out to produce a sensation, and put on everything she had by her to assist in so doing. For although it was a warm bright day, she had wound a huge boa about her in such complications as no one could ever conceive except the artists who paint terrible zoological dilemmas for the outside of shows. And she had also a muff, something like a grenadier's cap that had grown grey with years, and a bonnet of marvellous make, which anybody might have likened to a satin coal-scuttle turned topsy-turvy without fear of fetching his comparison from too great a distance to be good when it came. On this were mighty ribbons and flowers of luxuriant growth. It was just one of those bonnets that go to pits of theatres, and get right before you, and won't be taken off : the very shape of which implies false hair and no caps, and a maintenance of rights.

"Don't seem to like a van, marm !" said the jolly man to the lady, as she got very fussy, and twitch'd her boa about, and smelt something in a hair-oil bottle made like a shoe.

"It's the first time I ever rode in one, Sir," answered the lady grandly.

"Is it now, marm ? I dare say it seems odd ; but use is a second nature as the saying is, I never rud in anything else when I could help it."

"It's exceeding close," observed the cross lady, pushing the curtain still further open.

"Closer where there's none though, marm ;" replied the jolly man. "Cardinal Linsey—no that aint his name neither—Worstead ; what is it—as built Hampton Court—never thought he was building vans all the time, for they're all owing to him. What I want is to put one of his big state beds upon wheels, and go to the Darby in it. That would be a van ; something like !"

"Perhaps you'll just move your legs," said Sprouts, who usually found some difficulty in disposing of his own.

"Certainly," replied his fellow-passenger. "I should say you suffered from legs a good deal, Sir ! I don't think those belong to you though : you won them perhaps in a lottery. No, offence, Sir ?"

"Not a bit," said Sprouts.

"That's all right ! Put them under the seat, Sir : it's a long leg that's got no turning. What, you're there again, Mary, are you ? Give my love to your aunt !"

The last words were addressed to a rosy maid of all work, who came to an adjacent window as the van stopped for the horses to bait. They did not really imply that the jolly man had seen Mary there before, or that he was in any way justified by acquaintanceship in sending the message to her relative ; but they made the presumed Mary laugh and

say vaguely in reply, "I never see such an aunt," which any one might take as they chose, and affix to it what meaning best suited them.

The van went pleasantly on, not very fast to be sure, but the company had plenty of time, and everything on the journey amused them. They took the Wimbledon road, and thus furnished the jolly man with a fresh topic.

"We couldn't have come along here so comfortable once, marm," said he, addressing the cross lady. "Was you ever robbed?"

The lady never had been, nor anything so vulgar.

"Well, I was; and on this exact place, near Jerry Abershaw. I'll tell you about it."

And clearing his voice he commenced his narrative.

How the jolly man got robbed.

"I WAS quite a youngster when Jerry Abershaw was hung: and it was just at the side of the road here, lower down, before you come to the Robin Hood public-house. They hooped him up, on a gallows just like the one Punch beats the dust out of Jack Ketch's head with: and there he swung in his irons, until he got as dry as a chip, and the people didn't care more for him than if he'd been a crooked billet on a sign-post. They thought a good deal of him, though, at the beginning: for the Sunday after he had his first fine view of the country, the hundreds of thousands that came down to see him emptied London. There were stalls, and roundabouts, and cakes, and they sold more locks of his hair than all the old fronts of the Borough barbers would cut into. They called it Abershaw Fair, and when night came and they went away, they never expected to see him again. For they heard that a select circle of his disconsolate relations who lived in Kent Street, were going to cut the gibbet down and carry Jerry and all away. But Townsend was at Bow Street then, and he sat up all night with some officers, and did them. So there Abershaw hung, where we're now passing, and it's a pity he's not hanging there now, with a few more I could name if I choose: for the gibbets were quite pleasant things in a landscape, and always set off a view. But they're altering everything—worse luck. Nobody goes to Margate now with the pleasure they did, since they took down the men in chains at Blackwall.

"Jerry Abershaw's elevation did not stop the robbing at once; not a bit of it. The fellows galloped about just as before, and stopped you right and left. For the roads were so bad that most of the travelling was performed on horseback; and the highwaymen's nags were as superior to the ordinary ones in speed and build as a pirate's cutter is to any other. And when Abershaw was lifted up to study the stars, one or two took his beat, and all the old game began again, until the Bank paid in notes instead of specie. And then as the paper was easy to hide and difficult to pass, they got bothered; although if they thought you had any hidden, they'd strip you as naked as a new doll; saving your presence, marm," he added to the cross lady. "And, therefore, I think that the saying is 'naked as a robbing,' and not as a robin, which is a well covered bird, and if it was naked would look uncommon odd.

"There had been a great many robberies, and I had to go one night to Kingston, to be ready for the fair next morning; and with a lot of money. I heard in town one of the highwaymen had gone out; for, bless you, they used to set out from London in the open day, as bold as missionaries—so I made up my mind to do them. I rode an old screw, not worth a rap, if they'd chosen to take it, and laid in something else, which I'll tell you about presently.

"We were accustomed to stop then at a little inn on the edge of the common, to make up parties, and frighten the robbers by our numbers; but the night I got there, I was so late they had all gone on—drovers, travellers, fair people, and all, so I determined to start by myself."

"You must have been very much frightened," said Sprouts.

"Not a bit! People were so used to it, they didn't care twopence about it. Everybody at that time made up their mind to be robbed if they travelled, and I think they were disappointed sometimes if they were not. Well, just as I was setting off again, up comes a country-looking fellow, on the likeliest-looking horse I ever saw, and he asked me if I was going to Kingston. 'Yes, I am,' says I. 'So am I,' says he; 'and glad of honest company; only just wait a bit, whilst I hide my money, and I'd recommend you to do the same.' So we turned back a minute: I had a glass of ale; and he put his money in the lining of his cap, and his cuffs, and all sorts of places where I should have thought a thief would be sure to look, and then told me to do so. So I took off my boots, and he saw me ram my notes into them, and put them on again."

"Well—that *was* jolly green!" said Sprouts.

"Was it? Wait a bit. Off we started, and soon left the public-house behind us; and when we got to the pitch of the hill just where Jerry was creaking above us, my companion says to me, he says 'I'm Bob White, my boy!' 'Well,' says I, 'I'm very glad to hear it, if it's any good to you. But who's he?' 'That's who he is,' he says; and he pulled out a brace of pistols and aimed them bang at my face. Did you ever have that happen, Miss?"

"Oh, no!" said Bessy, with a shudder, hiding her face with her hands, as though she saw Bob White, bodily and pyrotechnically, in the middle of the caravan.

"It's a curious sensation it gives, but you can't describe it till it happens. I saw my customer in a minute. 'Come,' says he, 'off with your boots.' 'Oh—I'm not going to take them off,' says I; 'pull 'em off yourself;' upon which he got down, and told me he'd blow me off the saddle if I didn't do the same; so I thought I'd better. I got off and sat upon a road-stone just underneath Mr. Abershaw. 'The horses 'll stand,' he says; 'mine's trained to it; and your's couldn't run away if he would; put up your trotters.' If he'd been a boots all his life, he couldn't have taken them off better: and he directly pulled out all the notes and put them in his pocket. Just at that minute a thought struck me. 'Make haste,' says I, 'for I hear something on the road.' He listened; and not satisfying himself, climbed up on the top of the bank to see, for it was bright moonlight. I never could make

out what lucky devil got in my head at that minute ; I think it must have been the ale though ; but something put it into my head to jump on his horse, with a vault over the crupper, as I should have taken a high back at leap-frog, and come plump on the saddle. Then banging him with my cap, frightened as he was, he sprang off, and I was the very next moment going like—”

The jolly man's enthusiasm had nearly led him into saying a naughty word, but a look of alarm from the cross lady checked him, and he added :

“—like anything along the road ; and I never stopped until I got right up to the inn in Kingston market-place.”

“ Well, I never ! ” said Bessy

“ I can easily believe you never did, Miss. There was such a row when they saw me tear, clattering in, in knee-breeches—I beg your pardon, marm—and stockings ; and when they heard it was Bob White's horse, they gave me a supper. I'd got him, and I kept him ; and he was the best hack man ever crossed. An uncommon cheap 'un too.”

“ But you lost your notes ? ” said Sprouts.

“ Devil a one. They were all flash ones I'd put in my boot. The real fellows were safely rolled up in my neckcloth all the time : he'd miss'd them. So you see I wasn't so 'jolly green' after all.”

As the jolly man concluded, such an impetus had been given to the narrative faculties of the van party that they all began to tell stories at once, of things that had happened to them. And after this they dropped down to anecdotes, and witty sayings, and finally sang songs as smoothly as the occasional joltings would allow : comic songs, and songs of the jilted, which are known as love songs ; and one gentleman at the far end, in a gay stock, sang a song about sparkling glasses and bumpers ; which was somewhat premature. But these things convivial singers never understand.

For there is not a greater error ever allowed to go about loose, than the supposition that “ Bacchanalian songs,” as the Little Warbler calls them, tend to merriment. And how “ slow ” are the convivial songster's images, when pulled down from the stilts of imagery to the level of common place ! How cravenly the soul lighting the beacon of truth in the eye falls to the babbling and bewilderment that must end in the next morning's seediness and headache : what nonsense it is, to be told to wreath a bowl with flowers, when nothing of the kind is at hand : and if the guests were to begin to do it, what a ridiculously slow performance it would be. We are not at all wedded to teetotalism. We allow that in the gurgling of tall bottles, and the popping of champagne corks, there is much music, but then every thing must be equally fast about them. But how folks can imagine there is any thing entertaining in these dull songs, by themselves, is above the comprehension of any but beery German students and tavern harmonists.

However, the present party were inclined to be pleased with everything, whether they thought about it or not : and their glee lasted until they quitted the van, at their destination, and walked, in a body, into one of the entrance courts of the palace.

"Who are those, Tom?" said Bessy, as she looked up at some busts let into the towers, as they entered.

"Tiberius Imp," read Sprouts. "Imps? Oh! he's an Imp, is he? Well, I never saw any before. There's some more, too. Come along."

They followed the tide of people, and went up the grand staircase—not without a little awe and flutter, on the part of Bessy, for fear the soldier on guard at the foot should do something dreadful to everybody. And the soldier stared very hard at Bessy as she went in, so hard indeed that Sprouts would make her look at the paintings on the wall quite in another direction; and said they must mind what they were about now they were in a King's palace, or else they might be shot directly. And then making a very low bow to the man with the catalogues, who was no doubt a reduced member of the royal family, they entered the guard chamber.

"We may go where we like," said the jolly man; "just as if the place was our own. It wasn't so once; they penned you up in rooms, and hurried you round in lots, and made you pay at the end of it. But then I reckon royalty wasn't very well off just at that time, or they'd been above it."

"My goodness, Tom: what lots and lots of pictures!" said Bessy, as they proceeded, quite amazed at the paintings.

"I believe you," returned Sprouts: "and some of them—dear me—well I never did. They ought not to allow it."

And on this Sprouts covered his face with his hand, and pretended to be quite shocked: and Bessy blushed, and bit her lips into better cherries than they were before: and they moved away into another room. It was so very awkward.

"There's a bed!" said the jolly man, as they entered King William the Third's chamber. "Look at that, now—and all the muslin over the curtains. That's meant to pull all round it, and puzzle the fleas, as they do the musketeers in foreign parts."

"What's the iron net-work for?" asked Sprouts, directing the attention of the jolly man to what looked like an endless towel-horse stretched across the room, and crossed with wire trellis.

"Well, I don't know," replied their guide: "they use it in the park to keep the rabbits off, but that can't be the case in a bed-room. The cats, Sir: that's it—depend upon it: the cats."

They went on through all the apartments in company with some hundreds of others, thinking they were amused by the chilling dreariness a show place always presents to visitors. They stared at the rigidly clean dismantled rooms; the bright bars of the cold fire-places; the gaudy ceilings so perfectly incomprehensible to the majority. They looked with bewilderment upon the dismal old tapestry, and thought the little Indian soldiers and caparisoned elephants on the ground about the model of the Bengal palace the best things of all. But—it is in wretchedly debased taste to say so, and we deserve to be somewhat severely taken to task accordingly—they would all have been better charmed with a show at a fair; and the pictures outside the caravan would

have been far more attractive to The People than all the Parmegianos, Vandeveldes, and Poussins, or productions of any of the clever gentlemen who must have worked so uncommonly hard in their time to have produced even a quarter of what is attributed to them. It is delightful, we know, to talk upon paper of the infusion of a love of high art into the minds of the lower orders: and the impression that such is done by throwing open first-class galleries of pictures is, in all truth, a pleasant one to cherish. But would you wish the spell broken—go to Hampton Court: place yourself by the side of the commonest types of the usual holiday visitors you can find; listen to their remarks as they wander by the paintings; and glean from their comments some notion of what they think of them. You will find that art, or artist, has nothing to do with their attention—that the subject alone attracts; and that by the interest of the situation the picture describes, or the familiarity of its import, is the admiration of the masses regulated.

Sprouts, however, with Bessy on his arm—and it was difficult to say whether he was the prouder of her, or the artful little bonnet—was happy enough. And they looked at all the pictures, and forgot them the minute they had done so: and would have been equally attentive if the paintings had been no more than plain black surfaces—which, indeed, some of them over doors in dark corner closets appeared to be. And at last they had been through all the rooms, and came down another flight of stairs, and entered the gardens.

Nature and art had had a tough struggle in those gardens for centuries; but as it is the property of the former, in whatever disgrace she may be driven from anywhere, always to return as soon as it is practicable, she had at last got the mastery to the great detriment of the peacocks and dumb-waiters her opponent had compelled the yews and hollies to form. And very beautiful she appeared in her fancy costume of gay flowers, and huge waving trees, and short velvet turf. The sun shone on the water, and the water laved the turf, and sparkled, and looked blue; and the fish—vermillion, and piebald, and pearly—went gravely round and round the basin. And here and there the chesnut-trees, in their glorious bloom, appeared like leafy mountains, all up the sides of which snow-white pagodas were perched—each tree looking as though it were a model of a Chinese hill.

Of course the maze was the great lion. The jolly man had been in and out often, and knew the way; and he told Sprouts and Bessy a cunning secret respecting it, by which means they were not long in getting to the two garden-seats that adorn its centre. But he did not tell the cross lady—indeed, she would not have been told: and she got sadly bewildered. She went round all sorts of turnings, and found herself in no thoroughfares; and when she imagined she was on the point of success, she was obliged to travel back to the very outside path of all; and all this time, her bonnet and flowers only could be seen by the people outside, on the top of the fences, wandering about in great despair. There was a man appointed to guide

confused visitors, from the top of an observatory opposite the gate; but he only tended to make matters worse. For when he cried out "Black hat to the right," twenty hats at once altered their intentions, and became involved in hopeless perplexities. Some craven hearts took advantage of the thin foliage at certain points to creep through the fences in a surreptitious and humiliating manner; but they were usually punished by finding themselves further away from the goal than before.

"Bessy," said Sprouts, as they sat together in the pride and placidity of success, on one of the benches in the terminus of the labyrinth, "Bessy, isn't it jolly? How much money have you got?"

"There's all, Tom," replied Bessy Payne, as she skinned down her silk glove with some little difficulty, and produced three warm shillings from her palm. "Do you want any?"

"Not at all," said Sprouts. "I only wanted to know in case we might be driven. But that's not likely. I think I shall astonish you. Do you know what that is?"

As Sprouts spoke, he drew a huge old knit purse from his pocket, which, cut in half, might upon emergency have made two night-caps. From this he extracted a pill-box which he opened, and then took out a small coin elaborately enveloped in paper. To uncover this was the work of some dexterity.

"Now—don't scream!" he said to Bessy, "because it might frighten you. There!"

And he triumphantly displayed half a sovereign.

"Why, Tom!" said Bessy, "why—that isn't gold?"

"I don't know why you should doubt it, Miss Payne," replied Sprouts, with an assumption of severity. "Or do you think I stole it?"

"Stole it! Now, Tom!"

"Oh yes! and your 'now Toms!'" said Sprouts, as he got very indignant, and made a show of drawing his hand away from Bessy's; but he did not eventually. "Oh yes! you're astonished—I know; but it's a fact. Now how do you think I came by that?"

"Well—I don't know, Tom; it's a great deal. Perhaps you found it."

"No, I didn't find it now!"

"Perhaps it was given to you."

"No, nor it wasn't given neither. What will you give me to tell you?"

"I've nothing to give, Tom," said Bessy; "nothing; at least what you care about."

She looked very much though as if she thought she had.

"Will you give me a kiss, Bessy? Nobody can see."

"Oh, Tom! it's so very wrong, you know. It must be, else you wouldn't say 'nobody can see!'"

"Come, only one; a very little one. There's no harm in that, I'm sure; not if it's very little."

"Now, Tom, I won't," said Bessy, as her pretty little face got quite

close, somehow or another, to Sprouts. "There! that must last for ever so long. Now tell me where the money came from."

"Well, then," said Sprouts, balancing the coin on the top of his finger, "that's all carpet-bags and hard-bake. You wouldn't have thought it now, would you?"

"That I'm sure I never should," replied Bessy, looking hard at the money, as though she expected to see evidences of the fact on its surface.

"When old Gudy sends me out serving," continued Sprouts, "I make what I can on the way, at the piers and coach-offices, by carrying luggage for gentlemen who don't like being their own porters. But I'm not proud; not a bit, you know; am I, Bessy?"

"No, not a bit, Tom, I'm sure."

"You little dear!" exclaimed Tom, in the fulness of his admiration at her earnestness. "Well, what I used to get before I knew you went in sweets—onions and candle-ends."

"In *what*, Tom?"

"Oh! only made in sugar, you know. But they went so fast, and you were so much nicer than they were, that I gave them up, and took to potatoes, as being more filling and lasting longer. All the halfpence I saved I put in the empty boiler of the fire-place; and Skittler—you don't know him though—gave me half a sovereign for two hundred and forty of 'em yesterday."

"But you must not spend all that to-day, Tom."

"Bonnet and flowers—straight on," cried the voice of the keeper from his perch.

"Oh! take your arm away, Tom—do? There's somebody coming," continued Bessy. "And it looks so."

"It looks very cozy," replied Sprouts. "But Bessy now; listen here; don't you vote we marry?"

"Lor! Tom; marry! and you're not sixteen. The idea!" laughed the little milliner. "Oh! look at my shawl! what rumples it's in!"

And on this Bessy rose from the bench and arranged her shawl so coquettishly as she turned round and round, pulling it to its proper contour, that Sprouts was deeper in love than ever. He rose from the seat also; spun about to exhibit his tails, which he calculated made him nearly twenty; and then approached her.

"But some day—Bessy—perhaps—"

"Second to the right; no, not you, Sir; the bonnet!" shouted the keeper.

"Now—we've been here quite long enough," said Bessy.

"One more—only one," exclaimed Sprouts.

"Oh, Tom; I declare; I never did!" cried Bessy; just as the bonnet of the cross lady directed by the keeper, guided its wearer into the maze!

The lady was quite aghast at what she beheld and interrupted; and was evidently going to make a virtuously-indignant remark. But Bessy and Sprouts did not give her the opportunity, for they both ran away as fast as their legs would carry them, and the fences permit. And in their



Grouse under the influence of the "Grouse"

confusion they entirely lost the way ; and would have wandered about indefinitely had not the jolly man come to their assistance and brought them safely out once more into the gardens.

It was a charming day. The bright flowers glowed in the sunlight ; the fountains fell back in diamonds into the basins ; and the vermillion fish looked perfectly enchanted as they sparkled in the clear water. They must have been the same fish that raised themselves up, half done, when the beautiful young lady came out of the kitchen wall, and had a little conversation with her about their debts and obligations before they got out of the frying pan into the fire. So Sprouts thought, and so did Bessy, although the jolly man wickedly insinuated to the cross lady that they were all red herrings in a state of nature. The butterflies were quite mad with delight ; and whenever they met one another from opposite ends of the flower-beds, they gave a rapid poussette like the top and bottom people in Sir Roger de Coverley, and went away again ; or a whole party of them got terribly confused as to the figure, as many do in that festive puzzle ; and at last, quarrelling, flew off in a body to settle their disputes on the nearest rose-bush, followed by all their friends and acquaintances, who took a great interest in the affair, as sparrows would have done under similar circumstances. And, indeed, the sparrows as well, had a few differences of opinion in the lime-trees of the avenue, resembling the boys in the streets as to their bickerings. For they made a great noise, and, without doubt, insulted one another dreadfully, and were followed about by many other sparrows, who under pretence of seeing fair play, abused all sides indiscriminately and turned it into a general row. But they never touched one another—the boys never do—but they evidently threatened to do so, preparatory to all disappearing in different directions. There was still a great deal to see in the grounds and the park ; and it was pleasant to think what lungs-full of fresh, soft Spring air all the visitors were drinking in. For there were many vans down there, and they all came from crowded parts of town, where fowls fed in the streets, and children blocked up the door sills, and bits of stick were planted in flower-pots at the windows, and rubbish was allowed to be shot anywhere. Many of them made little gipsying parties under the trees in Bushey Park ; others had sly junketings in remote parts of the royal gardens themselves, hidden by tall flower-beds ; and a large number had tea—they had all great notions of tea—in houses thereunto appointed.

But Sprouts was resolved to celebrate the first day of his tails, and he went to an inn—not a pretence where they found plates and hot water, but a real downright public-house with a bar and a landlord—and there he ordered actual chops in a reckless manner, that only the possession of the half sovereign could have accounted for or authorized ; and he even hinted at bottled stout, and gave way to some wild anticipations connected with brandy and water, and other expensive drinks, of which he spoke so carelessly that Bessy feared he was already traversing some of the footpaths which opened on the high road to ruin. But he was not though, for as soon as they sat down to dinner—happier than everybody who had ever dined with anybody in those

snug little rooms at the top of the Blackwall and Greenwich and other taverns—all his proper caution and acute reckoning returned.

"Bessy," he said to his companion; "how nice it would be if chops were all under-cuts, wouldn't it? Do you buy all your own food?"

"Yes, Tom, always. Miss Twits don't like to buy meat, she says it wrings her heart when she thinks of the young lambs playing; and so I go to market."

"Then you know how much a chop costs, I'll be bound. Tell us, Bessy."

"If I wanted one for you, Tom, I should give sixpence; but if it was for Miss Twits fourpence-halfpenny."

"Oh—Miss Twits hasn't got a great appetite then?"

"She don't like anybody to think so. But if you knew the next day's buns she buys and eats in bed you wouldn't believe it."

"Buns in bed!" observed Sprouts, wriggling about involuntarily, as the crumbs suggested themselves, "Well—regular sheets and blankets don't trouble me much now; else, I *have* known what an Abernethy biscuit is—'one to be taken at bed-time,' as the gentleman who makes them would say. You always dream you've been bathing in broken glass and gone to dry yourself in a bee-hive, I say, Bessy?"

"Well, Tom."

"I wonder what they'll charge for this. Let's make it out. There's four chops in the dish—are they sixpenny ones?"

"Oh, no, Tom," said Bessy, looking at them as though she had been at market. "They weren't bought by the piece."

"Oh!" said Sprouts; "are they remnants?"

"Now, Tom; you are such a fellow! No—I mean—these are by the pound, I should say—tenpence perhaps for three. They shrink so, though, in drying, like muslin de lanes."

"I wonder how much that is for four," observed Sprouts. "However—that's no great matter. I dare say they'll charge us a shilling a piece."

"More than that, Tom; oh, bless you, more than that! There's fire, you know!"

"Oh, nonsense! chops make their own. I've cooked them often for Skittler, after Gudgy had gone home—we invented a capital gridiron out of an old mouse-trap. Fire's nothing; chops would get up a blaze from parchment. Have some more stout, Bessy? Because I shan't have any wine, though they have put the glasses to entice us into it."

"No—that's enough!—now really, Tom!—no more," said the little milliner quite in an agony, as Sprouts would insist upon her taking some. "It is so heady."

"Oh—it'll do you good," replied Sprouts; "never mind the froth—that's all nothing, you know. I say, though; isn't this plummy just?"

"I'm very happy, Tom," said his companion.

"And I'm sure I am," added Sprouts, making his chair describe an arc of the circumference of the round table towards Bessy. "I don't care for Gudgy now a bit—not a steel nib. Now, Bessy—only suppose

—just for fun, you know—only suppose that we were married and had a shop. What should we sell?”

And taking Bessy's little fingers in one hand, and his glass of stout in the other, Sprouts stretched his legs under the table, and gave himself up to comfort and independence.

“Well—only to suppose then, Tom—I think we would sell caps; and make them ourselves.”

“Yes,” said Sprouts; “oh—yes; I'd try.”

But he evidently spoke with a small reliance upon his powers in that art and mystery.

“Now what a foolish old Tom you are! just as if you could make caps!”

“Bonnets then, perhaps,” suggested Sprouts. “You said ‘we,’ you know.”

“Yes; but we should be both the same then, Tom; shouldn't we?”

Bessy looked cruelly wicked as she asked this question.

“Yes, dear,” said Sprouts; “we should be one—one in everything, except food and clothing.” And as he stretched his legs out still further, until they reached incalculable distances, he added, “I think I'll have a cigar.”

“Oh, Tom! you're not going to smoke! It is so horrid!”

“It's the thing, Bessy; depend upon it,” said Sprouts.

The waiter came in just at this minute to clear away some of the things.

“Ah! would you?” cried Sprouts, as the man lifted up his tumbler, in which some stout was still remaining. “Come now—drop that; and bring me a cigar—a nice mild cigar with a long straw, and not too much done.”

“Don't think we've any cigars with straws, Sir,” replied the waiter.

“Well then; you ought to have. Never mind; bring me what you have got.”

The man left the room and soon returned with a pallid weed, that looked as if it had been smoking itself, in a wine glass.

“Is this a good one?” asked Sprouts as he narrowly inspected it, and squeezed it, and smelt it, and did all that is proper to be done in such a case; which proceedings he had watched through the windows of snuff shops. “Give me a match.”

“Very good cigar, Sir,” said the waiter.

“Umph!” said Sprouts; “it don't draw very well.”

“Beg pardon, Sir,” said the man; “wrong end; not bitten the top off, Sir!”

“I know,” said Sprouts; “I never do. All right. Cut!”

But although he never did, as soon as the waiter had left, Sprouts lighted the other end.

“And now about what I am to sell, Bessy. What do you say to books?”

“Oh—delightful, Tom; and then we could read them ourselves. And I'm sure Miss Twits would be a capital customer if she lived near.

Do you know, she takes in six love stories, and reads them all at once, and she does make the wrong people marry so, you can't think. Isn't Mabel the Mildewed lovely, though?"

"I don't know her," said Sprouts, projecting his under jaw to give effect to the cigar-smoke, until he looked like one of those hideous ink-stands made like heads.

"Oh! you should read it," returned Bessy, warming up to enthusiasm. "There's a gentleman has a daughter, and wants her to marry another gentleman, but she's in love with another, who's a gentleman too, only you wouldn't think so; and they have such a dreadful fight, and then he finds out it's his brother just as he's dead, and she goes mad, and murders him in a lighthouse."

"Murders who?"

"Well—the other, you know, Tom. And at last it turns out that the keeper of the lighthouse is the real heir to the property, and they have a beautiful ball."

"What; in the lighthouse?"

"Oh, no, Tom; how could they? No, in a place all lights, and music, and ever-so-many things."

"Ah, I know; Vauxhall," said Sprouts.

"Now, Tom; it isn't! It's a place—oh—heaps and heaps of miles away, where the streets are always under water, and all the hackney coaches are boats."

"Wapping," suggested Sprouts, "or perhaps Lambeth."

"No—no—ever so much abroad; but it all ends very happily."

"Well, I'm glad of that," returned the other, "because it would have been so sad if it didn't. This is a dreadful bad cigar though; they ought to know better."

"You don't look very well after it," said Bessy.

"Oh—it's not the cigar," replied Sprouts; "it's this close room. I think it's time we went into the air again. Paugh! there!"

And to prove that it was not the cigar, Sprouts threw it into the fireplace; and at the same time rang the bell for the bill, which the waiter brought in all ready; and handed it to Sprouts on a chees e plate.

"'Dinners' they call this," said Sprouts, as he commented on the items. "Oh—but it isn't a dinner. There wasn't any pudding, you know, nor joint; how can they call it a dinner?"

"But we have dined very well, Tom."

"Ah! that isn't the point. They shouldn't call chops 'dinner'; now should they, waiter?"

The man did not know what reply to make; but he looked conventionally pleasant, and turned the plate round and round in his hands, and shuffled about as if the soles of his shoes were getting very hot.

There is a peculiarity in the shoes of waiters that has never attracted the notice due to it. They are, however, scarcely shoes, for their fabric is almost of Terpsichorean lightness; and they are not slippers, because they tie with regular strings; they are rather what a harlequin would wear in the bosom of his family, when he puts off his spangles of

display for the domestic Tweed. It is difficult to tell what shape they were originally intended to be. They were never meant for "Gents' Fashionable Walking," from their utter departure from every acknowledged normal shape; and they were certainly never made to measure, for they always twist round the foot, or hang on to its corns in some unaccountable manner rather than fit it. They must come from that mysterious dépôt, wherever it may be, which supplies hotel slippers and nightcaps: wildly fashioned things, like the productions of South Sea Islands and North American Indians—dingy leather moccasins and cotton scalps with a tassel tuft—without the beads, and coloured grass and bugles, that make their prototypes so festive. You never saw a waiter in Wellington boots; nor in anything but the peculiar flounder-like envelopes we have glanced at.

Sprouts paid the bill; with half a sovereign one cannot well stoop to petty discontent; and then he gave Bessy his arm, and they went over to Bushey Park, where most of the party from the van had collected. And they were having such games! base-ball, and thread-the-needle, and kiss-in-the-ring, until their laughter might have been heard at Twickenham. And when the jolly man caught a piano-organist who was going through the park, and made him play perpetually under one of the trees, and all the company began to dance after their own fashion, you cannot conceive how very famous they were. No matter what time the piano organ played; it made a capital country-dance, for they were not over particular; and even the cross lady at last found her heart soften; and when the jolly man went up and danced a lively measure before her, snapping his fingers in accompaniment, and next asked her to be his partner, she said she would, and they took their place and footed it with the best of them.

And to see how the jolly man twirled his partner round, and galloped her down the middle until she had scarcely breath enough left to beg him to stop, and set to her in gallant attitudes: my heart! it was, as Sprouts expressed himself simply to Bessy, "first-rate."

Bessy herself was a very nice dancer, as of course she ought to have been, for she had lessons of an accredited professor who took the off-nights of a National Palladium—where the true sources of power are provided with tea and discontent at twopence a head three times a week—and instructed his classes therein. And she had taught Sprouts certain figures, and managed to pull him through others, so that, on the whole, he did not cut any very remarkable figure beyond the one nature had given him.

They danced until the orchestra himself became weary, and the quiet greys of evening rose up over the trees and prospects of the park. And then the horses were put to; and the company were once more pegged into the van, and started homewards, the jolly man taking his old place and telling them funny stories the whole way. The journey did everybody good. The jolly man said it did him good, although as Sprouts remarked it was impossible for him to be better

the hob. On a broken sofa against the window were two more girls, and between them a boy of fourteen or fifteen with light hair cut very short, except at the temples, where it straggled into two corkscrew curls. He was smoking a pipe also, and drinking hot whisky and water from a pewter pot, the name on which had been roughly scraped away. At the table was a dirty unshorn man, in what had once been a suit of black : but it was now so rusty, and so pieced, that its original texture or colour could only have been found out by careful investigation. And on two chairs, under the bend of the staircase, something was lying asleep, covered up and snoring heavily : but whether man, woman, or animal, was difficult to determine.

" 'Oh my love he's a sailor and ploughs the salt seas,' " sang one of the girls as Rockey entered. "' Oh my love—"

" Hish ! Mealey ! " cried the old woman : " keep quiet, will you ? So you've caught him—have you ? " she inquired, looking at Christopher.

" Yes—that's him—safe enough," said the miner, as he lifted up the child, and exhibited him to the company. " There ! what do you think of him ? "

" Oh my ! what a nice little boy ! " cried the girl who had first spoken, as she seized Christopher and pulled him towards her.

" Let me look at him, too, Mealey ! " exclaimed the other girl, trying to draw the little fellow away.

" Now mind you don't pull him in half," said the boy, between them, upon whose knees Christopher had been pulled in the contest.

" Yes—take care of him whatever you do," said Rockey : " his head's worth all yourn tied in a knot together, as I've no doubt they will be one of these fine mornings. So you're out again, Master Miles."

" Yes, my p—idgeon," answered the young gentleman addressed : " come to see my friends before I goes in again. I can't stay out long. I misses the society and the wittles. I shall try and get six months next time I'm nab'd."

And in anticipation of that pleasant period, Master Miles smoked six whiffs very rapidly in succession, blowing the last in Christopher's face.

" You won't starve afore it comes round," returned Rockey. " And how's the Reverend ? "

He asked this question of the seedy man at the table, who had been an open air preacher, until the combined influence of London gin and Liverpool fog upset his vocation, from which his name had been taken.

" Well—I can't grumble Rockey," said the man, as he drew a roll of papers from his side pocket, enveloped in dirty leather, and unfolded them. " Petitions isn't quite knocked up yet. I've burnt out a good many at Newfoundland this last week, and shipwrecked half-a-dozen along the coast. I think next of going on your tack, and trying the choke-damp and explosion line. You can be of use to me in getting up a petition then."

" The Reverend's a great scholar," said Rockey, " but he don't

know manners: or else he'd have asked me to drink his health, and all the present company."

There was a stone bottle on the table, with a candle stuck in it. As Rockey spoke, the Reverend carefully took the candle, which was enveloped in paper, from the neck, and pushed the bottle towards the other. He also reached an egg-cup from the mantel-piece, and offered it to their guest.

"The measure is small," he said: "but you can fill it again: and the whisky's the old sort. Go on."

During these few seconds Master Miles had personally become the battle-field of a fierce contest between the two girls for the possession of Christopher. His first admirer, was however, at last, victorious; and she took him in triumph upon her lap, and then ran her dubby fingers through his golden hair.

"And so you're a little gentleman," she said, "and looks just as if the silk-worms had been spinning all about your head. Wouldn't you like to stay here always in this nice snug place, eh?"

"If Hickory was here, I'd stay with you," said Christopher. And the child clung to the woman, outcast as she was.

"Ah—I don't know him," answered the girl. "Lord! what a nice child it is! You ain't going to take him away yet, are you Rockey?"

"He won't be here long," said the man.

"I could regular love him, I could," continued the girl, kissing the little boy's face as though he had been a baby. "Look here, my man; take some of this."

And she forced Christopher to imbibe a mouthful of the contents of the pewter, which brought on a fit of coughing that had well nigh choked him.

"Now; mind what you're at with him," said Rockey; "he isn't used quite to that. They're a troublesome family, mother, ain't they?" he continued addressing the old woman.

"Ah!" returned the hostess, in accents of mingled asthma and resignation, "they don't know when they're well off. Always grumbling; and yet it would take ten policemen to get anybody out of this. They ought to be comfortable."

"You havn't sent nothing much to the mines lately," said Rockey.

"We've wanted nothing hid," said the woman; "leastwise not so far off. And we can manage swag here, now, pretty well. I tell you what, Rockey," she went on, lowering her voice; "we're all friends here, and so I can speak. If a sea-captain was to come here, and had a shilling, he'd lose it; and if he had a thousand pound he'd lose it: and not a chance of ever getting it again."

"I've always lost all I ever had when I've been here," observed Master Miles; "so now I never bring nothing but my company; and you'd have that if you could get it without me—wouldn't you?"

And Master Miles hereat winked with his right eye, and his left, on either side, and imagined he did the knowing thing.

"Cuss your ingratitude," said the old woman; "and when I'd got such a present for you!"

"Oh!" cried Master Miles, sharply; "what's that now?"

"Ah, you'd like to know; wouldn't you?" returned the crone. "Well—we'll see; we'll see; where's the light?"

She took the candle, and with an accompaniment of coughs and interjections, routed out a parcel from a ledge up the chimney. Then blowing the soot from it into the fire, she placed it, with an air of importance, on the table.

"There!" she said, as she commenced untying it. "That belonged to Harry Simmuns as cut his last capers upon nothing three years ago come Whit Monday. It's a jack-in-the-box."

She took out a brass instrument that looked at first sight like a watchmaker's lathe, and put it down before them. And then from an old oily bag she produced various short tools, like those of a centre-bit, only not so sharp, which she displayed at its side.

The eyes of Master Miles glistened with delight as he gazed on the instrument; an ensign with his first arms could not have been more delighted.

"I dare say, now, you don't know what that is," said Rockey. "It may be a vice, or cork-screw, or perhaps a nutcrackers; but it isn't. What's it for now?"

"To prise a box-lock off with," said Master Miles with a knowing nod of his head, and another wink.

"Good boy!" observed the landlady.

"But you can't use it," said Rockey, as he saw the boy's awkward attempts to handle it. "Now look here."

He fitted one of the tools, with a semicircular head, into the shaft of the machine, and then untwisted it, as if it had been one of the mechanical corkscrews. Next, he placed the head of it into the keyhole of the lock on the door and reversed its action. In an instant it wrenched the box off, screws and all, and they fell on the floor.

Master Miles clapped his hands with delight and cried "Brayvo!" he already imagined himself at the counting-house door of a large firm. But the old woman made a great noise at the damage.

"Never mind, mother," said Rockey. "Them as meant to come in, wouldn't be kept out by a lock; them as is in, don't care whether there's one or not; and them as you wants in is generally too glad to get out. Here's your health."

He nodded to the woman as he took up the pewter-pot, and then looked towards Christopher, who quite worn out with fatigue and fright, was nearly asleep.

"We'd better put the young 'un to roost," he said. Then turning to Master Miles, he added, "But take care of jack-in-the-box. There never was but two made, and when the man died he took the patent away with him, so you'll never get another."

"I know where the feller to that is, though," remarked the youthful Miles. "Mr. Dowling's got it in his office; and lets himself out with it, every day, for amusement."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Rockey. "Now, mother; where are we to put up?"

"Top of house," answered the old woman. "You'll hear that sick child, like enough: but it can't last much longer, so that's no great count. Here's a light."

She gave Rockey an inch of thin candle, and told the girl to hand Christopher over to him. The child was so thoroughly worn out that he made no resistance to going, but followed the other towards the foot of the stairs as if he had been a dog.

They went up the creaking staircase, Rockey leading the way with the piece of candle, and entered the room that formed the first story. It was exactly the same size as the one they had quitted, but without an article of furniture; for the three miserable beds upon the floor were nothing more than dirty rags. Where the stairs ran up by the room, the plaster had been broken away, and the laths burnt; so that the wind played in and out, coming through an unglazed window above. An old tin pot hung by the side of the empty grate, and a broken knife lay on the mantelpiece; there was nothing else moveable in the room.

But miserable as were the appointments of this chamber, it had six occupants. A grisly man in an old worn guernsey shirt, with red eyelids, blazing out from his white cheeks, was sitting on the floor, at the edge of the bed, watching a sick child that was lying on it. At the head, a thinly-dressed woman—so scantily clad that her miserable gown clung closely to her wasted form, and showed every angle of her bones—was leaning over the sufferer and trying to make it swallow something from a broken cup she held in her hand. The poor child itself presented a lamentable spectacle. Without a rag—literally—to cover it, it lay quivering with pain and fever on the wretched pallet; its limbs were wasted almost to the bones, except at the joints, where they were swelled—tense, and red, and shining. And in its face, nothing attracted attention but two large eyes, with which it was staring round the room with the wildness of delirium, shrieking, from time to time as it lifted a dry bone that it kept tightly clutched in its hand to its mouth. Every time a cry broke from its parched lips, it was echoed by two little girls who were hanging on one another, over the woman, and made common cause with the sufferer; and a neglected infant had crept from one of the remaining beds, and was now crawling towards the door, so that Rockey nearly tumbled over it.

The people scarcely turned their heads as he entered: it was so long since they had called any place their own, that intrusion, came as a matter-of-course.

"Is the child bad long?" asked the miner as he approached, feeling called upon to say something.

"Oh, he's bin ill a whiles," replied the woman, rocking herself on her knees, backwards and forwards; "and won't take nothing since Sunday."

"What are you giving him, missus?"

"Just a drop of whisky, and that's all, as they sent from down

below : but his stomach turns agin it now. He took to swelling yesterday, else he'd drink whisky at any time."

"You should have the parish doctor to give him some stuff," said Rockey.

"H'ugh!" exclaimed the man, with the sound of a short sneering laugh : "much good he'd be here. We should have the parish officers next, with the police at their heels, sniffing like dogs. And then where should I be? No—no : nobody but ourselves."

The little patient at this moment was seized with a fit of screaming, so violent that the lodgers above gave notice of their disturbed rest by thumping on the floor, with such force that two or three bits of the wretched ceiling fell down upon the bed. And the children, frightened at the combined noise, added their cries to the confusion.

"It can't last long, anyhow, at that rate," said the grisly man, as he watched a few of the child's convulsive writhings : "he fights hard for it, too, poor thing. Hullo! Benny, my man : where's father?"

But the child took no notice. His screams merely sank into a low wail of suffering.

Christopher had all this time been staring at the scene, almost with terror. But he now mustered up sufficient courage to pluck Rockey by the skirts, and attract his attention.

"Well—what do you want now?" asked the miner as he turned.

"Look here," said the little boy, timidly, as he made a search of great apparent difficulty through various portions of his clothes. "Here's a penny, that Hickory gave me last night. Give it to him—there—to buy some things."

"Oh—he don't want no things," said Rockey, taking the money from the child. "Have you got any more?" he added, "because if you have I can take care of it better than you."

"No—no more," said Christopher. And then he shrunk away from the miner, almost astonished to find that he had been talking to him.

They left the room, and went on up stairs. Here, there appeared to have been two rooms knocked into one : and comparatively early as it was, they were filled with snoring inmates, lying upon beds pitched in every available corner. They had hung their clothes upon lines, and put their scraps of candle to burn out on the roughnesses and ledges of the plaster. In one of the furthest of these beds, Rockey directed Christopher to creep, where there were already two occupants, one at the top and the other at the bottom.

"And if you were to try and get away," he said, "you'd tumble down and be dashed into little bits, ever-so-far below."

But the child dared not disobey ; so he crept into his place without undressing, wondering what lot was next in store for him. And then he cried himself to sleep, as he dreamt he was once more with Hickory on the sweet clean hay, and in the pure air of their country night lodgings.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. GUDGE THINKS OF TAKING A JOURNEY.

THE olive Gudge, in whom the hopes of Coke Villa were centred, was by no means an attractive child. Indeed his resemblance to the olive was more than emblematical, since people often affected in company to be exceedingly fond of him, even to saying they could eat him; their innate dislike, all the time, being unconquerable. Olives, however, are not the only things that persons in society swallow against their will, without making wry faces. But this by the way.

There prevailed a superstition in the breast of Mrs. Gudge that children required an immense deal of physic in the spring, whether they were in want of it or no; and, consequently, that season, as it came round, brought storms and tempests with it into the bosom of the family. For the Olive was getting beyond being deceived. The days were gone and past when he played the facetious game with his parents and Sarah at the breakfast table, of taking nice white sugar out of a teaspoon, in which potent preparations had been cunningly hidden. He was no longer caught by being unwontedly offered suspicious gingerbread nuts at six o'clock in the morning before he got up. And he mistrusted tamarinds. So that the process of giving him a powder became an open war in which no deception was used, except the phantom policeman in top-boots, with the strong cords, who was always in waiting in the coal-cellar to be summoned by the call of Mrs. Gudge, or Sarah when the Olive was rather extra-refractory, or displayed more than the usual tactics in fighting the battle. And these were numerous: he would artfully take the jam from the top of the spoon by clever management of his lips, leaving the medicine in the bowl: or he would clear it all away, and then refuse in any degree to swallow it; or else throw himself into such frantic convulsions that the chances were everything flew to distant places, in different directions, in the struggle.

Perhaps the Olive was not altogether deeply to blame for this behaviour. For in advanced years, of all the demons who haunt the couch, even of honest, well-regulated people, there are few so terrible as the draught to be taken in the morning. It hovers in fearful reality over your pillow throughout the hours of darkness; it is a nightmare on your calm repose; and sleep itself brings no relief, because you always dream you have taken it, and are once more free and happy, but only to awake and allow the truth to rush on you with chilling bitterness, that it is still lying on the bed-side, with its wretched paper cap and dreary label undisturbed. And when the fearful time arrives you are still a child in your objections, with the difference that your kicks and struggles are those of the mind instead of the legs and arms.

A circumstance that called Mr. Gudge from his slumbers at an earlier

hour than usual had been taken advantage of to administer a powder to the Olive; and the whole household was in arms long before breakfast, concentrating their forces in the attic which Mrs. Gudge called the nursery. Screams, enough to have thrown any neighbourhood into a reporter's state of excitement, came from the windows; boys collected at the railings and cried "murder!" or proposed violent and wicked remedies to quiet the offender; and the milkmaid rang the bell in vain, as its sound was unheard in the riot. But at last the object appeared to be accomplished. There was a sudden lull as the tempest died away in tears, and then Mr. and Mrs. Gudge descended to breakfast.

The contest had made Mr. Gudge unusually snappish; he had also risen before his time, which does not sweeten a temper inclined to acerbity.

"Now then! now then!" he exclaimed hastily; "no eggs! no coffee-pot! and where's the tongue?"

"It's no use your nagging, G; not a bit more than nothing," replied his wife. "Sarah's bothered to death: and I must take her part for once. She's over-worked and ready to drop."

"Pooh! nonsense!" said Mr. Gudge; at the same time somewhat surprised at finding his wife in any way excusing the domestic. "Who ever heard of a servant at six pounds a year being ready to drop; they haven't got the time."

And Mr. Gudge rang violently, giving the bell-rope such an unusual pull that it brought down all the cards and bills stuck behind the scollop-shell card-racks on the mantel-piece. In a minute or two Sarah appeared carrying the Olive, who was in his nightgown and still sobbing, on one arm; and holding a coffee-pot with the other.

"Where's the eggs?" asked Mr. Gudge, sharply.

"Biling," was the reply of the servant, in no very courteous accents.

"Fetch them up," returned her master. "And don't bring the child into the parlour with his mouth and chin in that state. Go and wash him."

Sarah murmured something inaudibly—the words "suit yourself" being only to be caught: and left the room.

"It's no use, G. I repeat it again, and again, the place is too hard for her," said Mrs. Gudge.

"Well; this is quite a new line for you to take up," replied the gentleman. "Why, I thought you told me she came from a lodging-house."

"So she did, but that's no—"

"Yes it is; I say—it *is*. I know what lodging-house servants can do well enough. I've lived in lodgings, I suppose. I remember one that waited on eight rooms, and all at once; she'd have shown the drone down stairs what work was. That girl could make the beds, answer the door, clean the knives, and fetch the beer, all at the same time. Why can't this one?"

The question touched on a species of domestic juggling difficult to explain; but an attempt at it on the part of Mrs. Gudge was stopped



Illustration of a scene from the play 'The Rivals'.

short by Sarah coming back with the eggs, and almost black in the face through the endeavours of the Olive to throttle her with her cap strings.

"Here! wait a minute!" said Mr. Gudge, as he gave one of the eggs a rap with a spoon that nearly knocked it through the cup. "Ah!—I thought so; the old story; not even set. Why the devil is it you can't give the white of an egg some title to its name?" And he held it out towards the domestic.

The latter part of the speech was somewhat obscure to Sarah's comprehension; but she understood its import.

"Please, Sir, it's the hour-glass."

"The who? the what? the how much?" asked Mr. Gudge, almost frantically.

"She means the egg thing with the sand," explained Mrs. Gudge, "that I won at Margate. You remember when—I hope."

This was an emollient allusion to the honey-moon: but it took no effect. Mr. Gudge still awaited Sarah's reply.

"It's no more use than a penny watch," said Sarah. "The sand runs down a little ways, and then it topples over upsy-down and runs back again."

"Well—but you've got a clock, I believe," said Mr. Gudge. "I *think* I paid for one—once. I never heard of burglars having been in the kitchen."

"Oh! that's no count," continued Sarah. "It always struck eleven for two, and now the hands goes backwards, ever since Master Josh broke the pendulo and we tied the salt cellar to it instead."

"Bring the saucepan here," said Mr. Gudge, "and go along."

The handmaiden appeared too glad to escape.

"You see how it is," said Mrs. Gudge striking the same string on which she had been playing before. "It's too much for her G., there's no concealing it no longer. We *must* have an odd boy."

"Oh! that's it," replied her husband; "is it. Don't you think there are oddities enough already in this house?"

"Well—that's neither here nor there."

"Where?" asked Mr. Gudge, sharply. He delighted in proposing questions that put people in a fix to answer.

"Oh! you know, G.," said his wife; "you know what I mean. We must have a boy to help Sarah. I wonder, myself, for your own consequence, you've never thought of it before."

"Well—there's my clerk—Sprouts. Won't he do?"

"Now, G.," replied Mrs. Gudge, in mild remonstrance; for she saw she had gained a point, from the absence of any outburst of refusal on the part of her husband. "Now, G., fancy that flag-staff in buttons!"

"I can't," returned Gudge. "I've never known him use any. And on second thoughts, I couldn't spare him from chambers. I think we'd better put another pound on Sarah's wages; perhaps that'll give her a little spirit."

"She can't do it," said Mrs. Gudge, firmly. "You really must

look about for a boy. We could dress him very cheap, and work all your old clothes in. Black, with bright buttons, makes blue, you know. Besides—think of the respectability.”

“Gar!” replied Gudge; “what’s respectability? Not buttons—no, nor large knockers, nor four-wheeled chaises, nor anything of the kind. It’s money, I tell you; money—and the money you save in not having your page, will make you quite as respectable as if you spent it on him; so long as people know you’ve got it, and might have one if you would. It’s all fiddle-faddle tomfoolery nonsense.”

Mrs. Gudge did not reply. She saw it would be injudicious to press the subject further, just at present, in her husband’s state of temper, so like a good general she withdrew her forces until a safe chance of attack presented itself.

Mr. Gudge finished his breakfast, and then with his blue bag took the first omnibus he found upon the road to Richmond, or rather the first that was going that way. For, as it is an acknowledged fact that whenever or wherever you may be waiting for one of those vehicles, half a dozen are sure to pass you immediately racing against each other in an entirely opposite direction to that which you wish to take, there was no reason why the occasion in question should be an exception. Mr. Gudge left in choler, amidst the renewed clamour of the Olive, who being left to himself had tumbled down the kitchen stairs in that uneasy fashion which a full carpet-bag would have adopted under the same circumstance. And finding nothing to vent his anger on, Mr. Gudge walked behind a woman who was carrying an infant with its head lolling over her shoulder, and made such fearful grimaces at the child, unknown to its mother, that it got quite black in the face with fits and thumps administered to its back, partly as a remedy partly in chastisement.

On arriving at Richmond, Mr. Gudge went straight to Sir Frederick Arden’s. It was, even then, early; and in consequence of some party on the preceding evening the Baronet had not yet risen. But this the attorney was not aware of; so he went in at the gate, carrying his blue bag with him, and rang boldly at the bell. A servant, having taken his time, answered the summons.

“Is your master in, young man?” asked Mr. Gudge.

“No; we don’t want any,” replied the servant, banging the door to very suddenly in the visitor’s face.

Mr. Gudge was for the instant paralyzed. Then seizing the bell-handle again, he nearly dragged it from its socket. The door was opened directly, as sharply as it had been shut.

“Why—you dirty scoundrel! what the infernal—”

There was just room for these words to get in, but no more. For the domestic would again have shut Mr. Gudge out, still taking him for an unlicensed hawker, had not he put the blue bag in the space that was ajar, and kept it barely open.

“Where’s your master, Sir Frederick Arden?” he roared through the aperture.

"What did you want?" inquired the servant, who imagined the blue bag to contain nibless steel pens, or festive boxes of sealing wax, or small packets of soap, or any other of those parcels which are left until called for, and which people, having unwittingly broken them open, feel compelled to buy.

"What's that to you?" said Mr. Gudge. "I'm his lawyer. Go and tell him so. To be kept here by a damned insolent flunkey in a morning jacket! Well—you're a nice article—you are. Go and tell him, Sir."

The man was somewhat awed by Mr. Gudge's important manner, rather than his appearance; and as he spoke, kept opening the door to admit him. But he would not yet leave him by himself, or shew him into any room; so he called one of his fellows and dispatched him to Sir Frederick, whilst Mr. Gudge chafed up and down the hall, with his red hair quite pale, in contrast with his face, which had arrived at its favourite hue of a boiled lobster. In a minute the servant returned with Sir Frederick's compliments, and that he was dressing, but begged Mr. Gudge would walk into the breakfast parlour.

"Ah! you can be civil enough to your betters, you sneaking hounds," said Mr. Gudge. "You'll shut the door in my face another time; will you? I should like to see you do it. Ur—r—r?"

And Mr. Gudge made a pretence of being about to bang the servant with his bag. He did not, however, do it—he was a lawyer—but walked into the room.

Breakfast was laid; and Mr. Gudge to shew that he was quite at home, after making the tour of the table, and whistling vaguely, which some folks think denotes their innate knowledge of their position—cut off a piece of roll, and digging into a potted pie, commenced a sort of second breakfast, which lasted until Sir Frederick came down.

"Morning, Sir Frederick," said Mr. Gudge, as the Baronet entered. "Didn't expect to find me so early, I reckon. But you see—I knew where I was, you know; capital pie."

"Quite right, my good friend," replied the other. "Of course you have not had breakfast?"

"Nothing to speak of," answered Gudge. "Not, at least, as—ha! ha!—as you nobs do the thing. Why, your breakfasts bang our dinners. We can't come it like that, you know, Sir F. It's as much as we can manage potted bloater; but a little of that goes a great way, ha! ha!"

His laugh turned all Sir Frederick's patrician skin into gooseflesh, but he said:

"Ah! you will have your joke, Gudge. I know there is not a better judge of good things in the world. That is why I want you to try that *pié*."

"Thankee," returned Gudge. "I've had one go in at it."

Just now the servant came in with the urn, and Mr. Gudge determined that he should not go out again without a reprimand.

"You wouldn't believe, Sir F.," he said, "that this fellow slammed your door in my face this morning; you wouldn't now, would you?"

But it's true, Sir. Oh! he's cringing enough here. Perhaps you'll tell him I'm not a poultry stealer. Oblige me by letting him know I don't wear handcuffs."

As, in neither of these social phases, would a person have announced his approach so publicly as Mr. Gudge had done, Sir Frederick Arden scarcely deemed the enlightenment of his servant, on this particular point, necessary. But he told him with some severity, at all times to pay Mr. Gudge every attention; and let him in at whatever hour he might call, even when he—the Baronet—was refused to every body else.

"You will excuse Lady Arden," said Sir Frederick to his ally, as the man left. "She was up late last night, and is somewhat indisposed."

"Oh—don't mind me, Sir F.," replied Gudge; "besides—it's just as well, perhaps. Um! you've some nice pictures here. A fine woman that in satin, and something like you."

"It was my mother," replied the Baronet.

"And that's Lady Arden, as sure as eggs is eggs; which they're not always, especially the Brompton twenty a shillings. But that's Lady Arden, nevertheless. Oh! it's a curious world; isn't it, Sir F?"

Sir Frederick did not reply to the question. But he asked Mr. Gudge what was the nature of his business.

"Well then," answered the other; "my ingenious scouts have been wide awake, and that useful scamp from the mines has tracked the boy to Liverpool, and nailed him—safe as the bank. There! what do you think of that?"

"I scarcely know," replied the Baronet in a flurried tone, after a minute's pause. "I should think it was all well. But—what can we do now? Where is he to go?"

"He won't go to the mines again: that's certain," said Mr. Gudge; "if he did he'd bolt; he must be quite an eel. I'm afraid he'll be some trouble to you still, Sir F., if some decisive measures are not taken.

And here Mr. Gudge made another cut into the *pâté* in a manner that indicated his own strength of mind most vividly. And then he began to eat; not that he was in reality very hungry; but he wished Sir Frederick to speak first.

"What do you mean by decisive measures?" asked the Baronet. "I will most willingly do anything in which I can see my way clearly. But it is a fearful drag—anyhow."

"What's a fearful drag?" exclaimed Mr. Gudge, so suddenly, that it startled his client, who gazed, not without some discomfort, at the malicious expression his features assumed. "What a fearful drag! I'm not, I hope. Eh?"

"My good friend—you!"

"Of course not, Sir F. I can't be. It was a fair compact, and neither was under any obligation to the other; for we both made a good thing of it. But you don't eat your breakfast."

"Oh—never mind that," replied the other, pushing his plate away pettishly. "I have something more serious to attend to."

"I am glad you think so, Sir F." returned Gudge. "I am pleased to find you view this affair in its true and serious light. It would be very awkward if anything was ever known of that first unfortunate attachment—awkward for both of us. Lady Arden's property is settled on herself; and a separation might—"

"Well—we will drop that subject, Mr. Gudge," said Sir Frederick. "What sum do you suppose would do for the boy, until he may be old enough to earn his own living?"

"Come, I will make a bargain with you, Sir F.," returned the other. "You shall give me five-and-twenty pounds a year, and I will engage to keep him out of the way. What do you say to it? Eh?"

He awaited Sir Frederick's answer eagerly; for a sudden idea had flashed across his mind. Mrs. Gudge had spoken of a page. Might it not be possible to keep the child in his service, and pocket the money as well.

"I will look well after him," he continued; "indeed I shouldn't mind having him in my own house, if you liked it better. He could be always under my eye, you know; and I needn't tell you, it would be to my own interest to bring him up in ignorance of everything. How shall it be? Eh?"

"As you please," replied Sir Frederick, with an air of resignation. "I feel that—"

"No; as *you* please, Sir F.," interrupted Mr. Gudge. "You must decide; only don't turn round upon me afterwards, and say that it was my doing, if things should go amiss. You give the word and it is done. But I beg pardon; you were about to say—"

"Oh nothing, nothing; that I was a mere puppet. But let it be as you please. Only keep him away, I could not see him; and the payment shall be made with the other. You will take some more breakfast?" he added, as if glad to escape from the subject.

"No—not a crumb," answered Gudge, rising and taking up the bag. "Here are one or two papers that concern you, and I must now be off. I will go to Liverpool myself; make yourself easy, Sir F. I'll contrive everything; we've got through more than this you know. Good day."

"Be cautious," observed the other.

"Cautious, ha! ha! I would take the eggs from under a sitting hen, and she be none the wiser. Stop; will you oblige me, Sir F., by ringing the bell, and ordering the servant to shew me out; it will teach him manners. Ah! I see you were going to do it. Thank you."

As the domestic entered the room, Mr. Gudge continued, more familiarly:

"Good bye; I shall look you up when I come back you know. Ha! ha! I shall look you up."

Sir Frederick forced a look not absolutely expressive of disgust, and bowed Mr. Gudge out of the room; but he did not shake hands with him. And when the lawyer got in the passage he said to the footman:

"Here, you Sir; carry this bag down to the gate. And look at me—"

—look at me well, so that you may know me when you see me, as surely as if you were on your oath. I suppose I shall be shut out again, eh? You fellows want a little curbing.”

As they got to the gate Mr. Gudge snatched the bag from the servant's hand; and then went back to town as he came, intending to start for Liverpool that very night.

CHAPTER XV.

WHICH REVERTS TO DR. ASTON, SCIENCE, AND POPULATION.

WHILST the various affairs preceding were harassing or gratifying the chief actors in them, Dr. Aston was still pursuing his calm journey through life in the salt town wherein we have before met him.

He had only one thing to vex him—the Parthenon did not flourish so well as he wished. The excitement caused by its inauguration had been but a tide that floated it temporarily, and now it was in danger of gradually settling down into the mud of inutility; which as the member of an ill-regulated mind, Mr. Saunders, declared was a great shame, inasmuch as he had not received half enough amusement for his subscription. He didn't want knowledge, he said, he went in for fun.

But the knowledge diffused there was of a very dreamy character—mere “Brummagem” learning; by which, however, none could be deceived, except the possessors. Whatever the subjects of the lectures were (and variety was an object in the selection) there were the same vacant faces, looking with the same fishy stare into the lecturer's countenance. And the owners of the dull faces heard one night a lecture on astronomy, and next week one on mathematics, which drove all they had heard about astronomy out of their heads, just as one pellet in a pop-gun drives out another. Then came some foggy subject, which, as it had no meaning at all—at least that the lecturer knew of—could not impart any very great deal of useful knowledge. Next others on dyeing and calendering—unknown islands in the South Seas and their political relations—smoke—Japanese forest trees—and the like; as well as pages cut from funny works and pasted in a copy-book, which were collectively called lectures on the Comic writers of the day. But the whole syllabus promised to be as useful to the members, as the cheap books in the boxes outside brokers' shops, labelled “All at 3d.” consisting chiefly of old Court Guides and odd volumes of unsuccessful novels are to the world in general.

Yet there were many good young men who made a point of never missing a single lecture—always sitting in the same place and never smiling, except when the lecturer to enliven his subject made some small witticism—or jokelet as Mr. Saunders called it—to enliven his subject with; which to them, for want of contrast or comparison, ap-

peared a masterpiece of wit ; really witty lecturers not being understood, or condemned, by Mr. Buffles as "trivial" "childish," or "superficial." Others assisted their memories by taking down incoherent passages in little note-books, in a handwriting which would of itself have been sufficiently unintelligible if they had ever again referred to it, which they didn't and never meant to do—having with it all some confused idea that the process they were undergoing "improved their minds," though not exactly knowing how it could—sitting out wearying lectures with a perseverance worthy of a better cause—applauding old truisms heard for the thousandth time, or listening with eager interest to facts which had not the slightest relation to them, and never would have, whilst they forgot them immediately, of course. And at last, when they came out each evening with their brains filled up like dust-holes with all the odds and ends, rubbish and broken pieces and chips of cheap knowledge, retreading the same path day after day—month after month—in the dull obstinate infatuation that they were speeding on the road to knowledge, when they were in fact only blundering about amongst the dust and sweepings on its edge.

As for the library, it contained but few scientific works : and those were generally full of superseded systems or useless theories—being mostly "presentations." For one of the uses of the library appeared to be—that persons having worthless books lying about their houses, chose by presenting them to the Parthenon, to save the trouble while they nobly sacrificed the profit, of selling them for waste paper.

The few really useful books the Parthenon possessed were seldom, if ever, taken down from the shelves ; while the staple stock—the novels and romances—were so torn, worn, and dirtied with constant use, that each volume became a sort of Bottle Imp ; useful only so long as the member holding it for the time could pass it on to another, and so on, until it came to the unfortunate last borrower, in whose hands it dropped to pieces and subjected him to the penalty of destroying the property of the Parthenon—whose huge broad seal was stamped in printing ink on the centre of all the engravings, and on all the blank spaces at the ends of chapters.

There were classes, too ; but those for which no extra fee was required were on the system of "mutual instruction," which may be defined as that of teaching nothing without a master. The course pursued appeared to be—that a number of persons ignorant of a particular branch of literature or science assembled once a week for the purpose of instructing one another.

And yet, with all this, to hear the speeches delivered at the meetings by persons who, pretending to entertain the most profound regard for the institution and its objects—(Mr. Saunders said its greatest "objects" were the members, with Mr. Buffles at the head of them)—never came near it, except for the purpose of displaying their own rhetoric, one would have thought the institution a Cradle of learning, a Nursery of Science, and a perfect Shrubbery of trees of Knowledge. But the trees were of that kind that would not bear transplanting.

Dr. Aston was not so bigotted to the pursuit of knowledge under

difficulties, but that he soon saw all this ; and therefore he collected all his rubbings from brasses, and wonderful butterflies, and pickled monstrosities once more into his own house, somewhat to the discomfiture of his old housekeeper who was in hopes that "all master's ramshackle forrin curocities," as she termed them, had gone away for ever. For with her, as with others on her level, she put down everything she could not understand as foreign—a portion of the globe confined to France and the Indies.

The house in which Dr. Aston lived was a curious little place ; something like a sixpenny saving's bank made very large ; and built of singularly ruddy bricks, that glowed as if they had caught chronic scarlet fever from the parish out-patients. On one side of the street door—and the house came out very strong in the street door line—was the doctor's own room ; and on the other the surgery. But nobody of ordinary faith would have believed in the latter, unless they had studied *Romeo and Juliet* and retained a lively image of the apothecary. There were no rows of jars and gold-labelled bottles ; no bright funnels, and white mortars, and glittering scales. All the medicines were kept in their old original green bottles, of every shape and size, the labels on which were utterly illegible ; but the doctor knew their position and outward form. If anybody had changed them, not even goodness knows what would have been the consequences ; the housekeeper, however, had orders never to touch them, and the patients in waiting never dared. For the last place in the world that would be robbed would be a doctor's shop ; the popular superstition being that all physics therein are poison, and knock people head over heels when the stoppers are taken out.

The doctor's curiosities, when they were removed from the institution were placed here. First, there was his air-pump ; a curious machine between a large coffee-mill and a small fire-engine, which, put in action, made grievous moans and other expressions of internal suffering, and performed aerial conjuring tricks to any extent. Then there was the electrifying machine, which nobody could be got to come within ten feet of, even in its quiescent state, for fear it might go off and blow them into bits. There were things in bottles, too, of wondrous form ; dreadful lizards, which people in foreign countries were reported to find in their beds when they retired to rest, and boots and pockets when they got up ; kittens with two heads of melancholy expression ; scorpions and centipides that the doctor had tried to domesticate and breed, and happily failed. All the old brasses were hung up as well—the gentlemen in armour with the lankey legs and impossible shoes, making footstools of vividly-conceived dogs ; the ladies in the powerful head-dresses, with hands inconveniently bent back in prayers, as if their wrists were hinges ; the unintelligible anecdotes of their births, marriages, and deaths underneath them, as difficult to read as samplers, out of which clever people made anything they pleased without chance of contradiction ; they were all there.

There were also gay butterflies, and alarming beetles, and sober moths—hornets' nests apparently made of silver paper and wafer biscuits—

stuffed birds and squirrels that stared you to death, until you got quite uncomfortable. And the doctor delighted in organic remains—petrified slices of rolled jam pudding which he called ammonites; small millstones, which he tried to persuade the ignorant were joints from backbones of bygone monsters; pebble sugar loaves, called by him Echimi, but known by the patients to be thunderbolts. All these things displayed about his surgery, had the useful effect of either amusing or frightening impatient invalids who waited to consult him, when he was from home.

Mrs. Grittles, the doctor's housekeeper, was perhaps the most remarkable organic remain in his establishment; for she had carried him when he was a baby, and now he had grey hairs. This had given her a sort of right to direct or lecture him from time to time: indeed she still addressed him almost as if he was a child; and by long usage, she had acquired an indistinct knowledge of certain drugs in the surgery, so that upon emergencies, to her particular friends, she would administer remedies. Indeed many of the parishioners put such great faith in her, that if the brass plate on the door had borne the names of "Aston and Grittles" it would not have been such a wild departure from truth.

"Bother your squillitons and all the livery institutions what sent back the gimcracks!" exclaimed Mrs. Grittles, as she entered the surgery where Doctor Aston was sitting, having caught her gown against the tusk of a wild boar's skull that hung near the door. "There'll be no moving soon here, with your vermins and fireworks."

The last word alluded, it was presumed, to the electrifying machine.

"Never mind, Mrs. Grittles," said Dr. Aston, who was pinning out a dragon-fly upon a large bung, "never mind; we'll make room for them. Is tea ready?"

"Who?" asked Mrs. Grittles; "tea! why I took it away an hour ago."

"Bless me!" exclaimed the doctor, as a light struck him; "ah! yes—so you did. I forgot. Ha! ha! Good soul—good soul."

"It's lucky I'm not a good woman, if they've got no heads," replied the housekeeper; "for I don't know where yours is, Master Robert."

She still called him Master Robert, at times, upon the strength of fifty years usage.

"That's a beautiful specimen, Grittles, said the Doctor, as he disposed the insect's delicate wings to his satisfaction, "of the *Libellula*!"

"Yar! you and your bellowers," replied the old lady, looking at it with supreme contempt. "Why—that's a horse-stinger, you know; there's nothing curious in that; there's millions upon billions over the pond out of doors. I don't know what games you've been up to at the institutions with your insects and things," she continued, as she busied herself about; "but none of 'em's as they used to be. Flies stops now, as bold as brass, till winter; and cheese-bobs never rolls up when you touches 'em, but goes on straight. There's a duster, burnt all in holes with your instution experiences."

It was evident that Mrs. Grittles looked upon the Parthenon as some

secret society for the subversion of everything; and all that went amiss in Doctor Aston's establishment she attributed to its influence.

"Old Brown's dead at last," she continued; "so they came up to say; went off quite comfortable, and makes a pleasant corpse. I knew he was going last night."

"Ah!" observed Dr. Aston, as he tried to range a level regiment of phials on a bottle stand; "did you see him?"

"No—not me," replied Mrs. Grittles; "but I knew it. There was one of them big squeaking moths come into my room. I squashed him though before he knew where he was."

"You don't mean one of those?" said Dr. Aston, pointing to a specimen in a case.

"Just like that, with the death's head and cross bones on his back; only twice as big. Big enough to eat all my cloak up if he'd been hungry."

"My good Grittles," cried Doctor Aston in a tone of pity; "you don't mean to say you killed one of those moths; they are worth anything."

"They're not worth my cloak, Master Robert."

"But they wouldn't have eaten your cloak," answered the doctor. "Moths don't eat anything; it's the caterpillar that destroys the clothes."

"Oh—drat it; I won't trust any of 'em," exclaimed Mrs. Grittles; "moths, nor cattypillows, nor none; they're a bad lot; and I knew old Brown was dead as soon as I see him."

Doctor Aston did not reply, for he saw that the theories of his old domestic were not to be contradicted; but went on with his dispensing.

"You've been out in the wet again," she continued, "in that boot with no sole to it. I hid it twice. Now if you go out in that boot again I'll burn it; so now you know."

"Mrs. Wisty writes to tell me," said the doctor, endeavouring to decypher a scrawl on a scrap of paper, that he might turn the subject, "'as the last powders have done her a power of good' and wants some more. Why I never sent her any."

"No; but I did," answered Mrs. Grittles; "and lucky too, or she'd gone to the new man." (It may be proper to state that "the new man" was an opposition doctor, whom Mrs. Grittles never called by any other name, although he had been in the town fourteen years.) "There was no anchovy, so I tried the piccalillow."

To the uninitiated, the style of medicine administered might have appeared curious. But Dr. Aston, fearful that the propensity of his faithful old servant for administering remedies might lead her into some trouble, had procured a staring red-labelled anchovy sauce bottle, and a common green mixed pickle jar; and one he filled with weak black draught and the other with powder of Epsom salts, tinged with a pinch of vermilion—neither of which could do much harm if the whole mass had been taken. And in these was the *materia medica* of Mrs. Grittles comprised.

"Hey day!" cried the doctor as he looked through the window; "who's this?"

"He's a noddity, ain't him?" observed Mrs. Grittles as the new comer rode a donkey up to the door and pulled the bell. The doctor immediately recognised Hickory, whom he had known in the neighbourhood, as the part occupier within a week or two of a small cabin at the verge of the parish, to which he and his troop retired in the intervals between the fairs.

"If you please, Sir, this is for you," said the mountebank, presenting a strip of paper—an overseer's order to attend a female. "I think you was spoke to a little whiles back to come to her. It's Luddy's wife, Sir; my pardner."

"All quite right, my good fellow," said the doctor, running his eye over the paper. "But cannot any of the women go?"

"No, Sir; I've been to all, and none's at home. They says there never was such a year for babies; they quite swarm."

Here Mrs. Grittles was heard to murmur, in a tone of displeasure, "I'd baby them;" but it being difficult to tell precisely to what punishment she alluded, or to whom, or under what circumstances it was to be administered, the observation fell dead.

Meantime, Doctor Aston ordered out his galloway; and then telling his servant to leave up a rushlight in the surgery, set off with Hickory, who attended on him in Sancho-Panza-like style, sitting on the extreme verge of the donkey. But when they got into the open country he came respectfully up to his side, stopping an interminable song he had been indulging in.

"Beautiful evening, Sir," he said, as his eyes wandered over the landscape, now glowing in the setting sun: "as good as a picture, Sir, ain't it. What a deal of money we could make if we was as tall as our shadows! I should soon shut up my conjuring box."

"Have you been long in this line?" asked Dr. Aston.

"Ah! nigh on forty years, Sir," replied Hickory. "I began when I was six or seven, as nigh as I could guess, for I never had a birthday to go by, not to say exactly. They put me on the tight-rope before I could hold the pole, and on the saddle before I was heavy enough to bide there; and I used to get blown off one, and whirled off t'other, until I do believe I could have hung on to nothing by my eyelashes."

It was an instance of physical power attained by use that the Doctor had never before heard of.

"There's lots of half-pence running loose about the world," continued Hickory, "to be had for catching; but the worst is there's just as many hunters. However, when you can't keep tame money for breeding, like rabbits, you must get it wild, as you can; and that's always my plan. But it's like everything else—going down. I dare say now, you don't find people so ill as they used to be, Sir."

"I can't say that I find much difference," said Dr. Aston.

"Oh, you would if you looked out, Sir; it's the same all round. Summer isn't what it used to be; nor more's beer, and they say books

isn't. I don't know much about them, but they isn't bound as they was once. You never saw an old red-edged book with the leaves started. I've an old bible with his edges as smooth as ever; and yet a song book I bought the other day came to bits the next morning."

"Have you got a bible?" asked Dr. Aston in a tone of some astonishment.

"Yes, I have, Sir; why shouldn't I? There's nothing wrong in it, is there? And I read it too; didn't I ought?"

He asked this question with such a strange expression, half simple, half sarcastic, that Dr. Aston did not know how to reply. So he turned the conversation, by saying:

"Oh, quite right; quite right. But we were speaking of things not being as they used to be."

"Yes, Sir, we was; and the mould-grubbers is worse off than all."

"Mould-grubbers!" said Dr. Aston, half thinking aloud, and imagining Hickory's term had some connection with distressed agricultural classes.

"Mountebanks, you'd call 'em; but that's the name they're known by in the trade. When I began business in that line there was lots of pleasant bits of turf about the villages, where we could pitch our rings for the horsemanship. But when we came afterwards they were all gone; railed in, and ploughed, and planted with potatoes. And if we asked how this was, 'Oh!' says they, 'the parish has done it!' But we never could find out who eat the potatoes; there wasn't enough for the parish, and too many for the overseer. However, the turf was all gone, and our business was regular knocked up."

"So you were obliged to find out another plan of life?"

"Yes, Sir; we lives as we can—a sort of boey-constricty's life—one feed a month, and nothing between. Calls us vagabonds, too, they does; I wish they worked half as hard. After all, the world's one great circus for mountebanks."

"You think so?" asked Dr. Aston, becoming amused with his companion.

"I know it, Sir. I don't mean to say that ladies and gentlemen throws thesselves head over heels, like spring frogs, all day long; or dines on paper shavings to bring barbers' poles out of their mouths; but they does things quite as curious to get an audience. For that's all they're trying after; when they gets a good audience they'll turn it to account somehow or another. I never sees windows lighted up at a great house, for a ball, but it puts me in mind of the outside of a dancing-show. It's all to pull 'em in; and when that's done the pint's gained."

With such like speculation, did Hickory amuse the Doctor, as the donkey cantered on bravely by the side of the gallows. For it is a remarkable fact connected with donkeys, that the more plebeian their position, the better they go; and this induces us to regard them, even with respect, as bearing some similitude to the fairy familiars of the old stories who worked for few above the rank of virtuous wood-cutters, or

right-minded cottagers in embarrassed circumstances. We might, to be sure, except all the youngest brothers of three princes ; but then they were usually in such uncomfortable predicaments, that the question is, whether the position of the aforesaid honest rustics was not an enviable one in comparison.

It was getting dusk when they reached the cottage where Hickory and his establishment were at present located. The galloway was housed in the shed, and the donkey was turned loose to pervade the neighbourhood generally, which being a remarkably poor one, did not offer him many temptations to stray far from home. And then Doctor Aston was ushered into the room wherein the unit was expected to be added to the last census.

The chief occupation of a country doctor resembles that of a railway guard, whose business lies in ushering people on to the platform at the commencement of a long journey, and assisting them as easily as he can away from it at its terminus, with the exception that he has no control over return tickets. But during this journey on the line of life he can attend to them at its different stations ; try to obviate any complaints ; and above all, see that the luggage they carry with them is carefully looked after, and in a safe condition. So the Doctor waited a little while in the sick chamber, during which Hickory and Luddy put the general room in such order as they could to receive him ; and then, finding he would not be wanted directly, returned to them, in what might be termed their workshop.

It was a place calculated to strike anybody upon entering : physically from the lowness of the doorway, and mentally by its general appearance. The walls were everywhere adorned with some object connected with Hickory's profession. There were ragged-headed canaries in cages, who had been singed bare by the frequency of gunpowder explosions they had to undergo, or the innumerable times a day they were compelled to wear cocked hats and knock over bullfinch deserters ; and whom, the mere reminiscence of the performance, kept in a continual state of chuffing, blinking, and tumbling off their perches. There was also the pyramid of bells, which Luddy wore as a hat, when he played a whole band of effective instruments at once ; managing the cymbals and drum with his knees, which performed on them involuntarily ; the pandæans with his mouth ; and the violin with his hands. The cup was there, too, which he strapped on his forehead to catch the ball, thrown up so high, that at last it went beyond the sphere of earth's attraction and never came down again ; the huge oyster knives, and curtain rings which were tossed about and entangled with such dexterity ; the infrangible plate and revolving basin, that spun on the flexible fishing-rod. And on the ground were the braces and belt, adorned with hazy spangles, which Luddy had at times worn, when he appeared as "The Bounding Ball of the Pyrenees," than which no more satisfactory geographical definition of what absolute position he was supposed to fill on those important mountains was offered.

But about the room were scattered a variety of smaller objects, which looked new, and wet with paint—models of ships, and elephants, and

sailors; rude scraps of scenery to represent forts and mountains; and on the ground underneath the table, was what the juvenile managers of little theatres call a "working sea." A distressed mariner was hoisting himself up a string that hung from the table, with a motion that combined the actions of the swimming frog and the flat warlike jointed figures who offer up frantic defiance to anybody who pulls their string; but after all are but playing the same part, for popular admiration, as the bedizened harlequin, who forms their reverse, when turned round.

"Don't disturb yourselves," said Doctor Aston as he entered the room; and Luddy, who was kneeling before a fire, rose at his approach. "Well, little Miss, what are you doing?" he asked kindly of little Patsy, who was at work near her father, and who for once appeared to have escaped from the imprisonment of the large bonnet. The child looked up, and showed him a small figure that she was dressing in the Turkish costume.

"It's for the new show we're getting up, Sir," said Hickory in explanation; "the Battle of Navareeny—against the long nights come back again, to exhibit in the public-houses."

"Oh, I see," said Doctor Aston, quite pleased with his mechanical twist, to find something going on in that line that might beguile the time; "and you are painting them as well as dressing them."

"Yes, Sir; we is," replied Hickory, sweeping some black dollies from a chair as he offered it to the Doctor. "Perhaps you'd like to take a hand, Sir, at it; we haven't much else to amuse you."

"To be sure, to be sure," said the worthy simple-hearted Doctor. "I shall be delighted."

And so he really was. Indeed he seemed to take up his work so comfortably, that Luddy went on with his occupation, which was toasting a red-herring on a tobacco pipe at the fire, and little Patsy applied herself to her task again.

"That's a first-rate figure, isn't he, Sir?" said Hickory, as he held up a little soldier doll in admiration before him. "The Duke o' Wellintun we calls him. Wait a bit—lets put his mustachios on."

"But the Duke was not at your battle—was he?" inquired Dr. Aston, not liking to upset any theories that Hickory might have formed of the contest, too rudely.

"Well, I don't disactly know, Sir," said Hickory: "but you see we can't do without him very well; we've tried to, before, in the Battle of the Nile, but it was no go. For 'where's the Duke o' Wellintun?' says they, and if they didn't see his red coat they wouldn't have the battle, at no price; but upset the ships with chesnuds."

"Oh, I see," said Doctor Aston, "quite right, quite right. But I should think he is a little too large in proportion to his ship."

"Not a bit, Sir," returned Hickory, as he produced an authority. "Look at this boat; from a first rate toy shop too. Here's a whole military band going out to sea alone, with no sailors. Now, you couldn't put them below, not if you packed 'em like bloaters; and if they laid down, their heads and heels would be over the sides; it's all right you see."



Dr. Aston's History of the

"I am sure you know best, my good friend," said the kind hearted Doctor, as he gave the finishing touch to a marine. "Can we do anything with these blacks. Who are they?"

"They're enemies," answered Hickory: who appeared to believe that all the adversaries of his native land were of that colour; "but here's a capital elephant if you'll put his eyes in for him."

The extraordinary auxiliaries engaged in the battle seemed to increase, and Dr. Aston was wondering of what use the animal could be at Navarino.

"He comes along the front, Sir, with the Emperor of China," said Hickory: "followed by his slaves with presents, and the sportsman who shoots the duck, and sends his dog in after it. There is the presents, and that's the duck."

The presents appeared to be chiefly apples in pyramidal heaps, and small dutch-metalled tea-urns, from toy services.

"This is supposed to be a large diamond, Sir," continued Hickory, as he placed a chrystal before the Doctor; "and we shall glue it on that figure's head. I reckon you know what that is."

"It is muriate of soda," said Doctor Aston.

"No, Sir, it isn't," replied the other, "that's nothing more nor less than a bit of salt. Although I've eat it all my life, I never knew what it was got from till a little while ago."

The worthy Doctor did not enter into any attempted explanation of chemical affinities to show that he had given the article its learned name. But he simply asked:

"And how did you come by this?"

"Oh! that's the worst of it," answered the other. "It was given me by a little boy, we picked up on the road; and I'm afraid got with bad hands afterwards. Poor little Christopher."

"Christopher!" exclaimed the Doctor suddenly, as he heard the name. "Stop! Christopher, what?"

"No, Tadpole," replied the other. "Ah! Patsy laughs; you knew Christopher—didn't you my lass?"

The Doctor laid down the elephant in an uncomfortable attitude on the table, as he gazed inquiringly on Hickory.

"I think I know something about this child," he said. "He had light hair, and blue eyes, and rather small hands and feet for a boy in the mines—had he not?" Hickory nodded actively. "And what became of him?"

"Well—there was a fellow I shouldn't much care to have met on a common, bullied him away from me at Liverpool, a little while before we came here. I was to have seen them again at night at a public house over against the docks; but when I went they had gone. Do you know the little feller, Sir?"

"Scarcely—scarcely," returned the Doctor, "that is to say—I may be mistaken. But I'll inquire about it."

"Do, Sir, and let me know," said Hickory, for we was got quite fond of him

During the conversation, Luddy finished his cookery, and with

Patsy's assistance had got together a marvellously motley set of tea-things, which he disposed on something very like an old gong; and put them amidst the ships and soldiers on the table, in the humble desire to show the Doctor some attention. But he appeared to have his thoughts otherwise engaged, and made a visit to the room of his patient an excuse for not availing himself of the mystic beverage which Luddy placed before him. Whilst he was here occupied, the sound of wheels was heard without, which ceased at the cottage. Then a voice was audible, apparently in altercation with some inferior person; and before Hickory and Luddy could reply to a sharp knock on the door, it was opened, and a stranger entered.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. GUDGE PROCEEDS ON HIS JOURNEY, WHICH SPROUTS TAKES ADVANTAGE OF.

MR. GUDGE was the owner of a very demoniac carpet-bag which he usually travelled with; one of the most fiendish bits of baggage of its kind ever met with any where, not even excepting on a cheap Boulogne steamer in the autumn.

It was an uncomfortable, surly, avaricious carpet-bag, and no attention could improve its condition: its sole object appeared to be, to render every journey it took as wretched as it could. In times far gone by—and its age was as difficult to tell as that of the Pyramids—it had been closed with a spelling padlock of words in one syllable, which the owner always forgot; only recollecting there were four letters and turning its alphabets round and round to “J,o,h,n,” “B,a,t,h,” “R,o,m,e,” “H,o,p,e,” and such like, until he got well nigh frantic. At last it was broken, and then the carpet-bag was merely closed by a strap, the tongue of which cut its way from hole to hole, until it was split all along. But this was its smallest evil.

For, when carried, it delighted to twist and cling about the bearer, getting between his legs and before his shins, until he bundled over it; and insulting passers-by in like manner, provoking ill-blood and contumely. And when thrust back, it would swing round with an impetus that carried its owner round with it, making him face quite another direction, and also dislocating his wrist. On the omnibus or coach, it was exceedingly unpleasant. It rolled off from any top it was placed upon; and would never go under any seat, or into any boot. And it had an impish property of assuming the likeness of other carpet-bags it travelled with; by which means it would be taken off as a changeling, to remote destinations, causing great distress and misery by leaving strange boots and razors in its stead; whilst, with regard to its gluttony, it incontinently swallowed up every thing put into it; and however full it might be, in the true spirit of greediness, would still hold more.

On great excursions, Mr. Gudge's shoes formed his dressing-case, into which he crammed his brush—he had but one—and shaving

tackle. When he was merely going on a night's journey, he carried a clean collar and tooth-brush in his pocket; but on a trip like the one he was about to undertake, he made greater preparations; being always haunted with an anticipation that he might be asked to dine in great society somewhere, where he would have an opportunity of making connection. And some blacking apparatus that shut up in a bootjack—a dreadful machine which closed like a hinge, and nipped the sole of your foot whenever you used it—was always included; for, as Mr. Gudge was wont to say, you could black your shoes for a farthing yourself, but it cost sixpence if the Boots did it. Indeed his whole life was a continued struggle against perquisites of every description.

"Tootsy," said Mr. Gudge on the evening of his departure by the mail, "Tootsy, don't forget the hard eggs and cold sausages, and the pocket-pistol."

He spoke thus affectionately to his wife to cheer her at his departure.

"They're all in the bag, Gudge," said his partner.

"And the little rolls: yes; all right. The cursed inns shan't get much out of me for snacks and suppers. I'll eat them in my bed-room for nothing. Stop; give me a twist of salt."

Mrs. Gudge gave him a little parcel that looked like a detonating ball.

"Why—look here!" he cried angrily; "here's the old story; one of these eggs only half boiled, and its broken over the clothes-brush. Where's Susan?"

"Oh! don't call her," said Mrs. Gudge, "or she'll be in her tantrums. She always is on a wash."

The steamy air of the house, which had converted every apartment into a vapour bath, had told Mr. Gudge what was going on. The very hand-rail of the stairs was damp.

"I thought I said I never would have a wash at home," said Mr. Gudge, as having removed the eggs, he laid hold of the carpet bag by the handles, and packed it with his foot very savagely.

"We couldn't help it, G.," said Mrs. Gudge. "The things won't be home till Saturday, and you'd nothing ready. I'm sure I don't want to wash at home. But of course everything's wrong; although I think you might see buttons in a worse state than this."

"What do you mean?" asked her husband, as he snatched a pair of white cord trowsers from his lady, and trod them into the bag after the other things.

"I mean, that if we washed at home, G." replied his wife with some excitement, "the mangles wouldn't smash your bone buttons to bits; and your collars wouldn't have their teeth fresh set to saw your ears off; and you wouldn't have pasteboard wristbands, and somebody else's neckcloths, and nobody's stockings; for I don't believe those last that came home could ever have belonged to mortal man, except Guy Foxes and that sort."

"There—never mind; never mind," said Mr. Gudge, impatiently. "Put the eggs on the fire again; and let me go off quietly."

"Quietly, G.?" said the lady. "I'm sure I don't wish to part bad friends. I'd bile the eggs myself in the copper, only they'd get lost amongst the table-cloths and curtains we put in because there were plenties of suds. There's Joey crying again; he's been and Italian-ironed his fingers, I'm sure. It's no use, G., we must have a page."

Mrs. Gudge hastened below, whilst the attorney finished his packing, and when she had returned with the eggs, Susan was called away from the tub to stop the first omnibus. There was a touching farewell; a contest with the Olive, who wished, then and there, to start with his father; and Mr. Gudge was on his road to the coach office, pondering on the last allusion Mrs. Gudge had made to the necessity of having a man servant.

The railways were not yet in work out of London; it was what people conventionally call "the fine old coaching times, when you dashed along the road behind four spanking tits." That many still exist of this way of thinking, apart from any profit or loss accruing from the change, is remarkable. With these we never could agree. We never saw any especial luck in getting the box seat, except that it compelled you at times to hold the reins, when your hands were cold and much more comfortable in your pockets; or to listen to the dull wearing stories of the coachman about subjects you knew nothing of, or people you cared nothing about. There are pictures, too, extant, perpetuating the agonies of slow coach travelling, which we look upon as we should do at those in Fox's Book of Martyrs—wakings up, cold and dispirited, on muddy mails, in dreary grey mornings—blockades in snow when there might be every reason for urgent hurry on the journey—halts at inns to change horses whilst you bolted a dinner, which you did not care for, but which it was not considered proper to decline;—these things could never really have been thought productive of excitement. And, besides, you never met with the high-bred barbs in harness that these solemn pictures represented, prancing along like the steeds of Phaeton; they were rather what advertisements term "useful machiners," sober, well-meaning animals in their way, but far more naturally placed in a street cab. Two or three hours of it, across a pretty summer noontide landscape, was all very well; but what there can be found to regret in the wretched night journeys, the sorry accommodation, the paltry fees for the merest assistance, or the waste of time, is difficult for unenlightened minds to conceive.

However, conventionality orders that it is to be so, and so it is: and conventionality is the greatest tyrant, as well as enemy, of the age. It makes people think they take pleasure in long classical concerts, and heavy five act plays or absurd old resuscitated comedies. It forces folks to eat over-fat roast beef at Christmas, whether they like it or no; it drags them in autumn to uncomfortable sea-side lodgings, and, when there, teaches them to resort to all sorts of dreary methods of getting through the day. It forces them into sweltering May meetings at Exeter Hall with the idea that they are doing good; it makes actors believe only in traditional types and costumes, instead of those moving about them in the world; it fetters down society—and especially as regards dinner parties—with chains of the dullest sameness; and perpetuates all kinds

of household absurdities, from laying pokers over expiring fires, to forbidding soup to be taken twice, however fond you may be of it; with many other mistakes too numerous to mention.

Mr. Gudge, having been sharply pulled down from the omnibus by his carpet bag, which he would not give up to any porter, at a compulsory expenditure of half-pence, tumbled nearly on to the head of Sprouts who was waiting there to meet him, according to an order, to bring him the latest intelligence of anything from the chambers. Sprouts had taken advantage of the appointment to make a three hour's holiday of it; and having diverted himself in various ways, such as skirmishing with unknown boys whom he pushed into strange shops for mere wantonness, carrying on insulting arguments with Mr. Punch, luring cab-drivers from stands and causing omnibuses to halt by deceptive signals, was gaining the good opinion of an ingenious merchant who dealt in prolific penknives, when Mr. Gudge's bag, followed by its master, descended on him.

"Where are you driving to?" asked Mr. Gudge sharply, as he tumbled on his clerk.

"Me, Sir? please, Sir?" answered Sprouts in confusion as he hurriedly returned a razor he had some notions of purchasing to humour his beard with, to the itinerant cutler. "Yes, Sir."

And with this unsatisfactory explanation of his conduct, he clutched at the carpet bag which had got under the wheel, and swinging it round knocked an old lady right into the office, where she had not the least intention of going. And a tide of porters and passengers following her, she was hurried on into the waiting room, and very narrowly escaped being taken to Banbury, in the heedless confusion.

"Which coach are you going by, Sir?" said a man touching his hat—one of those second-hand washed-out conductors, never without a hat-band, who lurk about coach-offices and seem to rise up through traps in the pavement at the door of every cab that stops at the kerb.

"What's that to you?" retorted Mr. Gudge in waspish accents, "I may go where I like, I suppose!"

"That's whether you likes to go or not," answered the man, winking at a friend who disposed of elaborate silver chains for sixpence to country visitors, and always had the last of his stock to sell. "I shouldn't think you liked nothing, to look at you. Hi! book-keepers: here's a gen'leman wants to go where he likes. You're full—aint you?"

There was a laugh in the little crowd: on which Mr. Gudge kicked Sprouts before him, and thus cleared his own way into the waiting-room.

A cheerless place enough it was, looking through a hazy window into a dark stable-yard; and appearing only made for those who were about to take miserable journeys. Hard benches ran round the walls, on which were scraps of posting-bills relating to by-gone coaches which had long ago run to their own ruin: dusty cards of used-up steamers hung to rusty hat pegs: and an old smoky mounted prospectus of some gasping Life Assurance Company in the last stage of decline, who knew what dreary things travellers in waiting were driven to read, and

calculated upon so attracting this little attention to its advantages which the busy world refused to pay, was hung over the corroded skeleton-looking fire-place, too high up for anybody to make out. The place smelt of damp straw and mouldy hampers; fish, stables, and empty wine bottles, all concentrated into an essence. And go there when you would, there was always an old lady waiting for a Norwich coach with a feebly-corded trunk, covered with paper of that festive pattern which they put round firework 'Jack-in-the-boxes' and 'flower-pots'; and holding in one hand an umbrella given to loose habits, and in the other certain spherical bodies which might be oranges, or hand-balls, or French rolls—tied up in a cotton pocket-handkerchief. The chances were, too, that you would see some woman with a child slung on his legs by a shawl loop which the mother held; and who was always striving and reaching forward after nothing, in anticipation of its future career. Coaching men came and left whips in secret corners: and helpers brought lamps, and bits of harness, and horse-clothes, from the most intricate lockers: and every thing was damp and dirty. The doors had been made never to shut, and the windows never to open; but there were tin whirligig cockades spinning in all directions, which turned unevenly and chattered as they went round, producing draughts everywhere, and great general discomfort.

"Anything happened?" asked Mr. Gudge, as he told Sprouts to put the carpet bag on the bench, from which it rolled directly.

"Nothing, Sir," replied the clerk, "except two or three things I knocked off at a tangent."

"Don't talk nonsense," returned his master, "Now, mind: you are not to leave the chambers until I come back. Close the outer door, and wafer 'return to-morrow' on it."

Mr. Gudge felt that the announcement would be sure to be right one day; but he did not undeceive his clerk as to the probable duration of his absence. He rather wished to keep him on the *qui vive* for his return.

At last the minute arrived, and the coach started. Sprouts received a last injunction not to quit Clements' Inn, and then as soon as Mr. Gudge was out of sight, he started off, as fast as his long legs would carry him; and never stopped until he got to Bessy Payne's, where he had an important affair to arrange with the little milliner, and her partner Miss Twits.

We need not follow Mr. Gudge upon his—what was then—dreary, wearying journey. Else we might show how stalwartly he fought against existing impositions the whole of the way; how he would put the carpet-bag on the coach himself when he got up "to bilk the locusts," as he expressed himself more emphatically than elegantly—although it always made it elf as disagreeable as possible to the other luggage; and how, he would also himself, pull it out of the fore-boot, diving down into that receptacle, like a bee in a bell flower, at the risk of suffocation and apoplexy. How also, he took outside places until he wriggled himself into the good opinion of the coachman, and got within at night, and when it rained, for a small bribe; and how, at the hotel at Birmingham, he confined his meal to a late breakfast and an early

meat tea, filling up the intervals with his hard eggs, in the suburbs, as he transacted some trifling business in the town, getting a mug of ale at a beershop. All this was repeated, until he arrived at Liverpool, when he went direct to a little public house near the docks; the same to which Rockey had taken Christopher. And where he awaited the coming of the miner, having previously made the appointment by a letter.

He had not long arrived before Rockey waited upon him, in the dusk of the evening, bringing the little boy with him. The short time that poor Christopher had been in the refuge in North Street, had not been without its effect. He was pale and dirty; his eyes seemed to be preternaturally large, and his hair was matted and unkempt. His spirit, too, appeared not only to have been broken, but utterly smashed. He cowered timorously even to the side of Rockey, when he entered the room, and started at every interruption.

"So, you got my note," said Mr. Gudge as they entered; "um! ah! very good. And this is the boy—is it? eh? Hold up your head, youngster. Umph! the mother all over."

He said the last words to himself.

"There—go to the gentleman," said Rockey, pushing the child, who went over to Gudge, as a dog would have done when ordered. "I've got him into capital order; he'll do anything you tell him, now."

"He don't seem very strong," said Mr. Gudge, as he felt little Christopher's small hand. "Bend your arm, boy; that's it. Umph! no muscle; not more than a girl's. Let me see you move that box."

He pointed to a large chest in the room. Christopher went towards it, but the task was beyond him. He made a trial or two, and then turning round said:

"If you please, I can't."

"Oh—yes you can," answered Rockey, "if you chooses. He's a reglar obstinate, he is, when he likes," he continued to Mr. Gudge. "Now—come, Sir—move that box. You wouldn't like to be put with the child that's dead, you know, up stairs at home. He's uncommon afeard of the body," added the man with a grin, after a moment's pause; "I don't think he ever see one before; and he had to sleep next it one night, when we was full."

"There—never mind," said Mr. Gudge, wishing to change the subject. "I think it's too much for him. And what little power he had appears to be scared out of him. Hi!—come here; there, don't be afraid. I shan't eat you."

Christopher looked up at Mr. Gudge, as if to assure himself that such a process was physically impossible, and then approached him timidly.

"Will you come with me?" inquired Mr. Gudge.

"If you're going to Hickory," replied the child.

"Hickory—who's he?"

"He belonged to they tramps he fell in with," answered Rockey. "He didn't learn no good there, depend upon it. It was lucky I catch'd him again."

"I don't know about Hickory," said Mr. Gudge to the boy; "but you shall come with me up to London, and have nice clothes. Will you?"

Christopher was afraid to reply ; but he looked at Rockey as though he asked permission.

"Thank the gentleman directly," said the miner, "for taking you to London, where all the gold is."

At his command, the child rubbed the palm of his hand upwards against the tip of his nose, and at the same time bowed his head.

"Oh! he's not quite an idiot," observed Mr. Gudge. "Seems to want feeding, though ; he's in terrible condition. I suppose he hasn't had too much to eat. Here—will you have some dinner?"

"I should like some, very much," answered Christopher, and this time with more confidence, as he had some vague notion that his bow had been appreciated.

Some bread and meat was ordered for Rockey and his charge, and they both fell to with a remarkable alacrity that might have induced any one to believe they had been somewhat stinted in the provision line lately. A large mug of beer was also placed between them, to which Christopher would have paid more attention than was likely to benefit his head, had not Rockey proved a useful check in this respect, by drinking off the greater part of it himself. But Christopher fared very well, nevertheless ; and he stood in great awe of the waiter, to whom, thinking that his first salute had created an effect, he made a low bow, with a repetition of the hand and nose performance, whenever he came into the room. But he was nevertheless rejoiced at being once more amongst respectable-looking people ; for although Mr. Gudge was not exactly the sort of man any one would have pressed to their hearts on a first acquaintance, yet he was still human, and not likely to be taken up and executed by violent and sudden means the instant he showed his face out of doors—a destiny which few of Christopher's late companions could have reckoned upon avoiding.

At night Rockey left, under a promise of returning, as Mr. Gudge was to go back, for certain reasons, by a route which went near the salt mines. Christopher remained to sleep at the inn, as did his new guardian, and early the next morning they crossed the Mersey, which the child directly recognized ; and then, by the aid of flies, return chaises, and taxed carts, all of whom Mr. Gudge hired for the lowest possible sums, got over the ground until they came to the town on the outskirts of which the mines were situated. It was Mr. Gudge's intention to see Dr. Aston here ; but he found he was from home. Rockey, however, knew the country pretty well ; and by the directions of Mrs. Grittles he piloted the driver to the cottage at which the Doctor was detained ; and which chanced to be Hickory's. Leaving the boy with Rockey in the chaise, and telling the latter to go on a little way from the cottage, he entered, and found the inmates engaged as we last left them.

"I think I speak to Dr. Aston," said Mr. Gudge, as he came to the table.

The good old practitioner put down the soldier he was decorating, and rose courteously to bow to the stranger : whilst Hickory, who had been sitting on the front bar only of his chair, for the reason that it had no seat, made it available by putting a piece of board across it, and handed it to Mr. Gudge.

"Don't disturb yourselves," said that individual, taking off his hat, and brushing his hair up into a sharper peak than ever. "I only want a word or two with the Doctor. Could you leave us a minute, my friends, eh?"

"Yes; sure we can," said Hickory. "Luddy and me will go and look after the Doctor's horse, and Patsy shall be sent into the bed-room."

And without another word they cleared off, leaving Mr. Gudge and the Doctor alone.

"I dare say you've forgotten me, Doctor, eh?" commenced the Lawyer; "but I recollect you. Not altered a bit: ten years younger if anything."

"You have the advantage of me, Sir," said the Doctor; "yet I have some notion that we have met before."

"Let me call it to mind," said Mr. Gudge. "Ten years back we met one night at an inn in Chester. A lady had been taken suddenly ill: and you attended her."

"I recollect it perfectly," replied Dr. Aston. "It was rather a mysterious business—something awkward—eh?"

"Never mind what it was, Doctor; so long as you recollect it, that's enough. The person died, you know; and as circumstances obliged the gentleman who had accompanied her to leave England immediately, you offered to find a wet-nurse for the baby."

"All very true," observed the Doctor. "I did do so; and I regularly received the money for the child's support from the agent of Mr. Edwards, until the woman died."

"I know; all right!" said Mr. Gudge; "and afterwards?"

"Afterwards the remittances ceased; and the parish took charge of the child. I lost sight of him for some time, and at last heard that he had been taken into the salt works; and apprenticed—if you can call it so—to one of the workmen. He was there, I think, a short time ago; but the children here, Sir, swarm about the country like rabbits, and the babies crawl over it like caterpillars. You are obliged to mind how you tread, for fear of putting your foot on them."

"You would have no difficulty, Doctor, in tracing the chain of the boy's changes and situations, if such was required?" asked Gudge. "I mean from his actual birth?"

"Not in the least," returned the other. "But permit me—is anything in agitation respecting the child, as I have always felt an interest in him?"

"Oh, nothing wrong—nothing wrong," said Mr. Gudge, hastily. "These little things you know—eh, Doctor?—sometimes—rather awkward for men of family. That's all: I see you understand me, eh?"

The Doctor felt that Mr. Gudge's perception of his comprehension was certainly clearer than his own; and he was about to speak, when the other interrupted him, going on:

"Then some day, Doctor, perhaps I shall trouble you. If you come to London—do you ever come to London?"

"My profession does not allow me to do so very often."

"Well—you may, you know. If you do, that's my card. Oh no, excuse me, that's my coal merchant's. Here it is—Coke Villa,

Brompton. There's no humbug about me, you know, Doctor—eh? When I ask a man to my house, I mean it; and he shall have the best bottle of wine in my cellar. I've got some port, Doctor, that—” (He was thinking “that cost thirty shillings a dozen,” but he checked the fact, even in his thoughts, and went on) “that has been in bottle—well, never mind, you shall come and try it.”

Not wishing to be questioned any farther, Mr. Gudge rose to depart, and wishing Dr. Aston good evening, rejoined his little party in the cart just as Hickory and Luddy, having had a small discussion on the points of the Doctor's gallows, were thinking of going towards them. It was fortunate for Gudge, however, that they did not; for a meeting of Hickory, Christopher, and Rockey, under any circumstances, must have caused a great deal of confusion.

“And now,” said Mr. Gudge to Rockey, “all that is well over. I shall settle with you to-morrow morning, and then get back with the youngster to London as fast as I can.”

CHAPTER XVII.

SPROUTS GIVES A SOIRÉE.

THE object of Sprouts's mission to the regions of the Waterloo Road was to inform Bessy Payne that Mr. Gudge had departed. For he had long promised the young lady and her partner that when such a circumstance occurred, he would give them a tea in the chambers; and he no sooner saw his employer comfortably off than he fixed upon the evening, and the guests were bidden.

Some small change of the Hampton Court half-sovereign still remained; not a great deal to be sure, but the company expected was not extravagant, and Miss Twits had promised to bring her own tea. And Sprouts determined upon inviting another gentleman, because, as he observed, “four was company and three was none.” He would have liked Skittler very much, but he scarcely thought his manners sufficiently refined to meet the ladies: so he determined upon hunting up “the Jolly Man” who had gone with them to Hampton Court. He found him out without much difficulty, and persuaded him to come; and thus everything was nicely arranged. Miss Twits, to be sure, begged Sprouts would not put himself out of the way to ask anybody on her account—for she had loved but once. But upon Sprouts telling her that love was not like the measles, inasmuch as people might have it twice, she smiled plaintively, sighed, and told him to do as he pleased.

All this settled, the first point was to secure the good graces of the laundress attached to the chambers. And this was rather difficult; for Mr. Gudge did not give her much employment, and less remuneration: and Sprouts made his own bed, as we have seen. But as every man may be bought, if you know his price, so may every woman too, only a great deal more easily; and Mrs. Peck's price was periwinkles; albeit, under other circumstances a woman of unswerving probity. She was frail, to be sure, when mixed pickles were in question, but only to a slight extent; drawing out the French beans and halved onions from

the bottles left by unwary bachelors in their closets. These she would eat by themselves ; and it was supposed they had imbued her nature with an acidity towards the clerks of her employers in general. Sprouts, however, knew pretty well how to manage her ; he was wont to execute her small commissions, when they were in his way ; and at times when Skittler sold off his stock late at night, at reduced terms, would take her baked potatoes. So he went down to Billingsgate, and procured her some periwinkles himself, accompanied by a gorgeous pin with a large glass head from the Lowther Arcade to eat them with, and Mrs. Peck's heart was completely won. She leant him a set of tea things—the property of the gentleman underneath, who was out of the way temporarily, through a bill transaction ; and hinted even that she would fetch the beer, if he found it inconvenient to leave his guests.

The event determined Sprouts upon appearing to great advantage ; and the night before, he had a small private wash in a salmon-kit which generally held his wardrobe of a cotton cravat and a pocket-handkerchief, which he subsequently ironed with the fire-shovel through intervening blotting paper to keep them clean. And as there was plenty of scribbling paper about, he cut an admirable false collar from a sheet of it, which he intended to fasten behind with sealing-wax ; and so he was now fully prepared for his company.

They were very exact to time the next evening, just as St. Clement Danes' bells were performing that very melancholy tune which they play at certain hours under mistaken notions of entertainment. Sprouts, who was most nervously on the alert, heard their voices on the stairs, and hurried to let them in. How Bessy did laugh when they entered ! joining the reminiscence of some little private joke between herself and Miss Twits with the incomprehensibly absurd notion of coming to see Sprouts in the very chambers of "old Grudge," as she would always call him, until she could hardly say, "How d'ye do ?" She had never seen Mr. Gudge ; but she looked upon him as something between Bogy and Mr. O. Smith, whom she had once seen perform over the water "in such a lovely play," as she said, "where the lady shot off a real gun through the door, and killed the horrid wretch outside, who had murdered the young farmer she kept company with ; and it did look so natural, you know, all the blood did, that I shut my eyes, and couldn't bear to see it."

The manner in which Sprouts received his company was rather energetic than refined. He stuck his elbows into his ribs, and knocked his knees together, exclaiming, with the most painfully violent contortions of feature, "Halloo ! here we are again ! how are you ?" after the fashion of the clown's welcome in a pantomime. And then he put his hand upon his heart and made a bow, in the same style of etiquette, until his face almost touched his toes ; having gone through which ceremonies, and considering the demands of etiquette fulfilled, he shook hands with them.

"Oh, my goodness, Tom, what fun !" said Bessy, as she clapped her hands and looked around, but still expecting Mr. Gudge to appear, like a demon, through the almanack, or the "World at One View," that

hung against the wall. "And so these are chambers. Law! Were you ever in chambers before, Letty?"

A cloud passed across Miss Twits' face.

"He lived in chambers," she said, with a sigh: "or rather, one. I went there often—but not alone—never alone, Bessy; pray understand that. Heigho! these chambers bring back many hours of bygone happiness."

It might have been difficult for a common-place mind to have discovered much tendency to pleasurable images in the bare floor, the grimy windows, and the tumble-down, rickety appearance, altogether, of Mr. Gudge's chambers. But the reminiscences of love are strange things. In such a case, memory becomes a prism, tinting even the dreariest objects with the brightest hues: indeed, we look at every thing a long way off with our mind's eye, through a chromatic telescope.

"Let me take your things," said Sprouts, not knowing very well how to look pathetic, but wishing to say something. "You must put them on the shelves. My stars! what's all that?" he added, as he looked into a little basket Bessy Payne carried.

"Oh, you mustn't touch that, Tom," cried Bessy Payne, catching it away from him; "that's all work."

"Is it now?" asked Sprouts, holding up some little singular bits of stuff that looked like Chinese puzzles made out of spring patterns.

"Well, I shouldn't have believed it. What's this?"

"What can you want to know for, Tom? That's a gusset."

"If I didn't think so," said Sprouts. "I've got them in my shirt—two. But, I say Bessy, are you making a shirt out of that gay stuff for anybody? Won't he be a swell!"

"Now, Tom, if you talk so I declare I'll go; and so will Letty—won't you?"

But Miss Twits did not reply. She had gone to the window, and was watching the sun declining behind the chimneys, with her cheek upon her hand, and gazing at two bits of stick, which looked like slips from a birch broom that had not struck, planted, one in a flower-pot and the other in what had once been a large pewter desk inkstand.

Bessy thereupon busied herself about, and began to put the tea-things in order, producing from her basket a little caddy of tea, and a small foolscapful of sugar. The caddy was of tin, with a black man's head on the top, and had been won at Camberwell Fair, at the spinning arrow, by the wrecker of Miss Twits's heart. It had a very weak lock, the key to which was usually a bodkin, or the point of a pair of scissors, or a fork, or a hair-pin, or indeed anything that came handy. Sprouts, with great pride, produced some shrimps and cresses—Bessy's only fault in speaking was that she would call them *srimps* and *creases*—from the bookcase, and then, in equal state, he appeared to conjure up a knobby loaf and some butter from a deed box. And whilst he was doing this, there was a single knock at the door, followed by a mild double one, as if the visitor had thought better of himself after the first.

"Gracious, Tom! what's that?" cried Bessy starting.

"Don't let any one in, Mr. Sprouts," said Miss Twits, in agitated

accents ; "what would be thought of us ; how cruelly we might be wronged."

"Its all right," said Sprouts, "I know its that good fellow that went with us to Hampton Court. Now, let's sell him," he said with a wink, as he continued, "Who's there?"

"Its me," said a voice, which Tom and Bessy recognised as the jolly man's.

"What do you want?" he added, with another wink.

"Nothing," said the voice.

"Ah, we don't sell it," replied Sprouts ; "nobody's at home."

"Is he?" said the voice. "Then I want to see him particularly ; so let me in."

At which even Miss Twits laughed, and Sprouts opened the door.

"My service to you, young ladies ; good morning this evening, how d'ye do to day?" said the jolly man all in a breath to the girls, which made them laugh louder than ever ; and Bessy whispered to Miss Twits, "Oh, he is such fun, when you know him."

"Well, I've come, you see," he continued to Sprouts, as he struggled hard with something in his pocket that would not come out. "I've come—ill winds blows apace, you know—and I have brought something with me. Ah ! that's it !"

His mind was evidently very much relieved as he emancipated a flat stone bottle from his pocket.

"What's that?" said Sprouts.

"Oh ! that's only milk-and-water," replied the jolly man, "because I can't drink tea ;" and from his other pocket he produced a wine-glass without a stand. "Just try it, Miss," he added to Bessy. And then he poured out a little of it, which certainly looked more like water than milk of the two.

The girls looked at it, and smelt it, and blushed, and simpered ; and neither of them could taste a drop of it—no, not for the world ! But at last they were persuaded to, and when they did, they coughed and laughed, and made a face, and laughed again, as if it was the best thing ever done. And then Bessy said she would make the tea, to hide their confusion.

The tea-making was great fun. Bessy undertook it just as if she had been a little matron ; and it is presumed that allusions to this effect formed the staple of sundry whispers that Sprouts addressed to her, for she kept saying, "Oh, Tom, the idea !" and "How stupid you are ; I declare I never did !" but she did not seem very angry. And she asked everybody in great form, if they took tea and sugar ; and afterwards, if it was as they liked it. The jolly man paid great attention to Miss Twits, and was particularly attentive with the shrimps, calling her attention to the biggest ; and told her he was sorry there were no muffins, because she could not see what a nice man he was to hand them, especially in a small party like their own. And Miss Twits did not sigh once, really appearing to forget all her sixpenny romances, and the woes of 'Mabel the Mildewed' especially, in the good temper of the jolly man ; who shewed her some very singular and very curious puzzles with money, taking in Sprouts himself at last, who thought he was

quite up to every thing of the kind, through his intimacy with Skittler.

"Now look here," said the jolly man, "those thirteen shrimps are horses, and that bit of crust's the master that has brought them; and those twelve water-cress leaves are stalls in a stable. Now how can you put the thirteen horses in the stalls, and only one horse in each."

Miss Twits hadn't the least idea, and Bessy thought how clever the man must have been if he did it. But Sprouts was not so easily foiled. He looked knowing, and removed single shrimps surreptitiously, and added more leaves on the sly; but the jolly man was too sharp for him. At last he said:

"Well—I give it up."

"Quite right," said the jolly man, "that's just what the master did."

Another famous laugh rang merrily, this time all at Sprouts' expense, which lasted until Bessy cleared the things away, and aided by Miss Twits, washed them all up; and then their visitor gravely put the large stone bottle on the table, and four tea-cups, and the girls got their work out.

"We must make the fire up a little," said the jolly man, "although it is so warm. Where's the coals?"

"Oh! there hasn't been any coals here ever," replied Sprouts, "I burn the house, usually."

There was a great manifestation of astonishment amongst the company.

"That closet's the fuel," said Tom going to a dark cupboard, wherein was anon heard a splintering of wood and falling of rubbish, directly afterwards crunched under foot, as Sprouts reappeared with some dusty laths in his hand.

"There!" he said, "I've nearly got through the ceiling, and must come to the rafters soon. How it will astonish the landlord some day—won't it? But nobody ever goes there. Capital stuff to burn too: it's so dry."

The fire was made up—the kettle steamed; and the jolly man insisted upon mixing whatever was in the bottle with the hot water and sugar, and slices of a lemon, which he brought out of another pocket—his coat seemed to be made of nothing else—and then pouring the fluid into the tea-cups. And, as before, the girls made a great fuss about it, just putting it to their lips, and shuddering and declaring they could not, and next taking a little more, until it appeared to agree with them very well. Which being understood the jolly man took out his pipe, and hoped it wouldn't be disagreeable. Oh, no! quite the contrary, they rather liked it! They worked, and told more stories, and sang songs; at all of which the jolly man assisted—even the first; and Bessy thought she should have died, when he would sew a piece of what she was making; pushing the needle with his finger and thumb through the stuff, as he would have done a bit of thread through its eye, and then, in the absence of a thimble driving it on by pressing its head against the table.

"I only understand buttons," he said, "and those are things every bachelor is compelled to know about. Oh! we're miserable creatures somehow, all alone. Ain't we, ladies?"

He actually went so far as to wink at Miss Twits from behind his pipe, and Sprouts gave Bessy a poke with his finger, and asked her if she heard *that*. After which the girls smiled faintly, and glanced at one another, and worked harder than ever; as the jolly man began a new song, filled with delicate insinuations, about a courtship under an umbrella, which he got up and acted to perfection, with one belonging to Bessy, which she never went out without.

It was a song with a pretty tune and merry words, and the jolly man kept urging them to sing the chorus; he made an admirable joke by calling it "coal-box" with such earnestness, that they joined in at the top of their voices, even including Miss Twits. And Sprouts got so excited that he could not sit still, but at every burden performed a curious dance about the room, holding his tails in his hands, and getting more and more lively, until, at last, the door of the chambers opened sharply. Imagining that it was Mrs. Peck come to see how they were going on, he assumed a comic attitude, calculated to inspire her with pleasurable feelings; when to the horror of the company, an ungainly carpet bag flew into the chambers and knocked him off his legs, followed by the terrible apparition of Mr. Gudge!

The jolly man at first thought it was another guest arriving with a practical joke; and being interrupted in his song, was about to throw the carpet bag back again at the visitor, when Sprouts stopped his hand; and the next instant Mr. Gudge spoke, as well as he could for anger and astonishment.

"So!" he exclaimed, "this is what takes place, if I leave home! is it? You miscreant, you! you swindling double-faced scoundrel! Oh! you shall pay dearly for this!"

By this time it was quite apparent to Bessy and Miss Twits who the new comer was, and they were ready to drop. The jolly man looked in confusion from one to the other; but Sprouts, inspired by the presence of the girls, and the beverage of the jolly man, scrambled on to his legs and put on an air of defiance.

"Do yer worst!" he cried: "I won't be bullied any longer. I've stood it all too long already. That for you!"

And Sprouts snapped his fingers almost in Mr. Gudge's very face.

"Oh, Tom! don't; pray don't!" said Bessy running to him and seizing his arm, "consider, do—you might do something you would repent of!"

"Mr. Sprouts," cried Miss Twits, who suddenly put on the penny heroine, also laying violent hands on him. "Forbear! unless you would see me roll a senseless corpse at your feet!"

The jolly man simply assumed an attitude of defence against everybody, and exclaimed: "Here's a go!"

"Be off this minute with these creatures; or the police shall help you," cried Mr. Gudge.

"Creatures!" screamed Sprouts, "who are you calling creatures?" He here got bolder and bolder. "Come on, I tell you; come on, you pettigoffer, you!"

And he threw himself into a pugilistic attitude and darted about the chambers, breaking from all restraint, and squaring about wildly, in a

manner only natural to two pugilistic boys in the street who are afraid of one another.

"Leave the chambers this minute," said Mr. Gudge, "and never shew your face in them again. I discharge you."

"You discharge *me*!" continued Sprouts, still manifesting his war-like feelings. "I should like to see you do it. But I turn *you* off; and you may suit yourself with somebody else, who will do all your dirty work, as I have done."

"I don't think I can be of much use in making this up, Sir," said the jolly man; "but everything, you see, is very fair and proper. There's no great harm done, I reckon."

"Hold your tongue!" exclaimed Gudge. "Get your things together and pack off—this minute—the whole lot of you. Where are your clothes?"

"Don't put yourself out," said Sprouts. "Creatures, indeed! my clothes are all here—here in this old cash box, and you owe me four and sixpence. Here, Bessy—here's your basket and bonnet:—you and Letty wait down below. You'll mind them—won't you?" he added to the jolly man.

"To be sure," he said; "come along ladies; one under each wing. Good bye, Sir: and better manners to you!"

The girls were glad enough to get away; and when Bessy Payne had again implored Sprouts to command his temper, they hurried down stairs. Gudge threw down the money that Tom had demanded; and the latter, then taking up a small parcel containing his clothes—which upon emergency he could have carried in his hat—went after his friends meeting them in the court. The jolly man then proposed that they should all finish the evening on board a steamer moored off Hungerford, the steward of which was his brother, and the plan appearing agreeable to all, they directly moved there to quiet the ladies' agitation; to finish the song; and to talk a little about the future destiny of Sprouts; which appeared to be thus suddenly rendered somewhat hazy.

No sooner were they gone, than Gudge called a little boy into the chambers, who had been all this time slumbering from the disturbance in a dark corner of the passage, wondering what he was to see next. It was Christopher, although so hidden in Mr. Gudge's own original rusty blue serge wrapper, that nobody would have known him.

"There, come in; I'm not going to eat you," said Mr. Gudge, not in the mildest tone; "and recollect you must obey *me* now. Sit down there."

Gudge pointed to the pickled salmon kit, which had been turned topsy-turvy to make a footstool for some of the company, and Christopher meekly took his seat upon it, whilst the other ran hastily over a few papers on his desk left in his absence. And then finding nothing of particular importance, he told the child to take up his carpet-bag and come with him. But the wrapper and the luggage were too much for the little fellow; and it was not until the bag had tripped him up, and pulled him down one flight of stairs, that Gudge took it himself; and waited in the Strand until the omnibus passed that was to take them to Brompton; into which, having partly lifted, partly cuffed Christopher, Mr. Gudge contrived to get as well as the bag thought proper to allow.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHRISTOPHER IS PREPARED FOR HIS NEW PLACE.

It is always a failure to arrive anywhere unexpectedly. And herein do they err considerably who take the givers of general invitations at their word, and drop in upon them at uncomfortable times ; or think to surprise their friends by an unlooked-for visit.

We hold it to be a premeditated insult when an acquaintance—friends never do it—informs you that you never come to see him, but “why don’t you drop in at any time, because he is always at home?” If he really wanted to see you, he would name an especial day, and provide things in your honour. But whenever you call upon such inducement he is either out, or just going out, or engaged, or miserable ; or something else that teaches you very keenly, you are in the way. Never by any chance do you find a snugly-laid table in readiness for anything to promote chat, even if it is at the very minute at which, by his own admission, he always had “a knife and fork for a friend.” And this forms a general rule, to which, in the teeth of the proverb, there is no exception.

When Mr. Gudge got to his home, he found that Mrs. Gudge had gone out somewhere to tea ; which is a species of visiting that has ever been much in repute at Brompton. She had, moreover, taken with her those troubled spirits of domestic life, the keys ; and so everything was locked up. This circumstance, coupled with his late quarrel with Sprouts, caused Mr. Gudge to alight at Coke Villa in such a terrible temper that Christopher was quite scared ; and the Olive, who had been crying with rage and breaking his tightly-stuffed doll into a shower of bran over Sarah’s head, was quelled by the burst of parental wrath that accompanied the return, as a water-spout is blown away by the discharge of a cannon. Fortunately, however, Mrs. Gudge came back in time to prevent her husband from inflicting a deep pang in her bosom, by ordering all sorts of teas and toasts and refreshments generally from a neighbouring tavern, which he meant to have displayed in great form as a bitter sarcasm upon the housekeeping at Coke Villa.

“Lord, G !” exclaimed the lady as she entered, “who’d ever have thought of seeing you back ?”

“Not you for one,” growled her husband. “Pretty goings on, everywhere, it seems, as soon as my back is turned, both in chambers and at home. Where have you been ?”

“Only into Snash’s, next door,” replied Mrs. Gudge. “That poor woman’s always in such trouble, I never did. There’s her aunt with the money, that they all thought was going to die, has turned as lively as a grig, and is going to Bath ; so I went in to comfort her, for

Snash has just missed the Stamps and Taxes again, which he thought he was to have had. And besides, it was very lonesome in here."

"Lonesome—pooh! Havn't you your child to comfort you? Look at that infant; ought not that to attach a mother to her home? Eh? I ask you: is it not enough?"

Mrs. Gudge looked at the Olive. His appearance was not at that moment very prepossessing, principally from his having endeavoured to arrange his hair with the blacking brush, which he had brought up from the kitchen.

"There!" said Mr. Gudge, dragging forward Christopher, who had shrunk frightened behind him; "there's the page you wanted. Go to that lady, boy."

"He's very small," observed Mrs. Gudge, not wishing to be too much pleased, after a short survey in which she turned Christopher about as if he had been poultry, or anything else she was buying. "And where can we put him? I'm sure I don't know."

"Ugh!" growled her husband; "like the women: ding! ding! ding! till they gain their point, and then they don't care about it. Never mind; he shall go back then."

"Now don't be hasty," said Mrs. Gudge. Just then the Olive had fixed his grasp on Christopher's ringlets, which he was trying to pull out by the roots. As the little boy endeavoured to free himself, the Olive tumbled over, and his head impinged upon a gothic knob of the fender. "Why, you nasty spiteful little thing!" cried the lady; "how dare you treat my dear child in that way. There!" and she gave poor Christopher a stinging box on the ear in her indignation, as she added: "Don't roar here! Get down stairs, do; and I'll see Sarah about where you can be put. There's no place that I know of, except she finds you a rug in the kitchen; and that you don't deserve."

The little boy did not want a second command, but quickly followed the servant, who had been peeping in at the door, to learn the cause of the unwonted excitement.

Sarah was not a bad sort of girl: albeit the vexations of the Gudge establishment sometimes chafed her into temporary fits of anger, designated by Mrs. Gudge as "tantrums," to remedy which the Olive was usually administered, as people apply a blister on the system of counter-irritation. She had a tremendous deal of work to get through; but always contrived to be neat and tidy in the evening, when she sat down with her work-box, and began to make caps, intended to fascinate the baker on future occasions. If the Olive had not retired to rest, from unwonted liveliness, he somewhat discomposed the manufacture; and his meddling producing some great convulsion might have accounted for the chaotic state of the work-box, which wanted a claw, and had no divisions; but held confusedly reels, winders, and needle-cases; scraps of net, ends of wax candles, and Gordian webs of sewing cotton; decapitated needles trying to look like pins with sealing-wax heads, feeble bodkins, and battered thimbles that had been bitten into fitting.

"Don't you mind her, my man," said Sarah, as Christopher entered the kitchen, still rubbing his face after Mrs. Gudge's infliction. "I don't now, not a bit; no more than that!"

And here, Sarah, in that spirit of hospitality which always makes up the fire on a new arrival, thrust the poker into it as strenuously as if Mrs. Gudge had been upon the end of it, and she had picked out the most furiously hot place she could find for her reception.

"Where do you come from?" she asked, when her mistress had been sufficiently charred, in her imagination, to satisfy her dislike.

"Liverpool," said Christopher, "ever so far away, where it's all ships."

"And where are your things? haven't you got any clothes?"

"Only these," returned the little boy, touching his motley wardrobe, which still retained some of Hickory's finery.

"Law!" said Sarah, in a tone of commiseration. "You've had nothing to eat too, I dare say. I'll give you a hog's pudding. Mother sent me up a whole string of them last week."

And Sarah opened a plate warmer, which did duty for a cupboard, and brought out what appeared to be a petrified polony for Christopher. It was hard, and white, and singularly tough: twenty currant dumplings had apparently been violently rammed into the skin of one sausage to form it.

"Don't eat so fast," said Sarah; "or you'll be choked. Here—drink a little water. You shall have some of my beer by and bye, when I fetch it. Poor little thing! Ah! I hear you plain enough."

The last words were addressed to the parlour bell, which had been rung sharply: and Sarah went up stairs, leaving Christopher to finish his refreshment. She was away some little time; as the Olive had to be put to bed, which was a process he had a singular objection to, happen when it might. For the incredulity he displayed with regard to taking a powder, extended to many other domestic affairs. He no longer believed in the dustman who threw the staple article of his calling into little boys' eyes at a certain period of the evening: and his faith was shaken in the notion that either his father, mother, or Sarah, had gone a hunting at unwonted hours to get a little rabbit skin to wrap him in as he slumbered; or that it was the general bed time of the house. So a little comic domestic drama was usually performed of everybody saying good-night and pretending to retire to rest, by which means the Olive was finally deceived; and, in the dread of being left by himself in the dark parlour, at last consented to accompany the housemaid.

Some arrangements had also to be planned for Christopher, and it was decided that a couch should be made up for him on the floor of the kitchen, of such travelling cloaks and carpet-bags as could be found about, only for a night or two, Mrs. Gudge intending soon to get one of those pantomime-trick bedsteads, which always go on their knees in the middle of the night, and slide the hapless inmate, bolsters, blankets, and all down to their feet. This was soon done, and for lack of night clothes he curled himself up in those he had on, and was soon

asleep, unconscious of every thing about him, including especially the black beetles who commenced a grand review as soon as the fire and lights had departed.

The next morning Mr. Gudge was up betimes : for the dismissal of Sprouts compelled him to be very early at the office ; and he determined to take Christopher with him. But as the little fellow's wardrobe was somewhat calculated to arrest the attention and provoke the comments of those watchful street imps, the boys, he was partially enveloped in a cloak belonging to the Olive, which had been made from one of the bygone pelisses of Mrs. Gudge, trimmed with fur that might have resulted from one of the sleep-bringing huntings above alluded to, judging from its look. It was besides much too short, and gave him rather the appearance of a small dramatic nobleman who stood at the extreme back of a banquet, being fashioned after those rich cloaks which stage aristocracy of all countries and epochs so especially incline to—especially those who keep behind. They are a humble class, but worthy of observation : indeed, there is nothing more amusing in a gorgeous stage assembly, than to single out some guest in the rear of all the others, and concentrate your whole attention on his deportment during the scene.

When the omnibus stopped at St. Clement's church, Mr. Gudge's first care was to ascertain from Mrs. Peck that nobody had yet called ; and then he took Christopher with him into the adjoining purlieus of Holywell Street, to provide him with some clothes, on the shortest notice.

The entrance to Holywell Street is guarded by ever-watchful sentinels, of uniform features, who labour under an impression that every passenger has come there with commercial views as regards his apparel. And they attacked Mr. Gudge, severally, as he approached, but were unable to detain him. For he went on, past the rows of tail coats, that looked as if they had been hung for forging their own newness : of tarnished military costumes which reminded Christopher of Hickory, and uncouth waistcoats and trowsers, which excited the wonder of spectators, not that anybody had ever sold them, but that anybody had ever had them to sell—past lowering gloomy bookstalls of aged volumes ; until he stopped at the door of a dealer which he appeared especially to single out. The merchant, who reminded one of lead pencils, Sheriff's officers, oranges, race-course cigars and gents' fashionable vests all at once, asked them in, and Mr. Gudge directly accepted the invitation.

" Vell, Mr. Gudge, and how dosh de varm veather agree vid de accommodation bills ?" asked the owner of the store, who appeared to be on terms of intimacy with his visitor.

" Nothing to complain of, Isaacs," replied Mr. Gudge, " nothing in the world. It brings them out like butterflies ; and they're as difficult to catch sometimes ; eh ? he ! he !"

" Ah—you vill have your little joke, Mr. Gudge," said the other, " I vish the varm veather would bring out the beautiful monies like butterflies, too. Wouldn't I run after them with my hat. Hope there's no money wanted to-day, Mr. Gudge."

"No, hang you," returned the attorney, "nothing like it: quite 'tother. I want you to look at this boy."

"Vot a nish little boy!" observed Mr. Isaacs, in tones of benignant admiration: "von of your little boys, Mr. Gudge?"

"Never mind whose he is," answered the other: "have you got a good servant's dress for him to wait in as a page, foot-boy, knife-lad—anything?"

"Just got von, quite made for the little boy, as if I'd known he was coming," said Mr. Isaacs: directly afterwards looking round to see if he could carry out his affirmation, and then failing to discover anything at the instant, he pounced in desperation on a garment, and exclaimed: "There's the beautiful dress, vith such a nap as never was."

"Why, that's a red hunting coat!" cried Gudge. "Pshaw!"

"No, my dear—that is, Mr. Gudge—" returned the merchant; "it's the beautiful royal livery, with the gold buttons left plain to put your own crest on, just look here, now."

And as he was speaking he lifted Christopher on to a stool and slipped the coat, which was of a full man's size, on him.

"There's a fit!" he exclaimed admiringly; "just vants the least bit taken in at the back, and the tails shortened hardly at all."

Mr. Gudge since he last spoke, had been looking over the stock that hung near the light, to see if there was anything more likely to suit. But as soon as he perceived Christopher buttoned up in the coat, he waxed very wrath with the merchant.

"Why, what the devil do you take me for—an ass? a fool? an idiot? eh?" he exclaimed. "Pull it off—do—this minute. You know what I mean, as well as I do."

Mr. Isaacs had not anything more likely to suit, but he knew his good neighbour Mr. Hart had: and calling a small copy of himself from a dark back room to watch the wares—as though he expected Mr. Gudge would decamp with all the second-hand garments in his pocket—he went next door, returning presently with a large bundle of boy's apparel. After much hammering at its price and fit—the ideas of Mr. Isaacs and Mr. Gudge being widely different on these two points—Christopher was at length stuffed into a tiger's jacket and page's trowsers of the most approved form, in which mongrel costume, holding his legs and arms as though he were trussed for roasting, he accompanied Mr. Gudge back to Clement's Inn, to sit upon a deed box and watch that gentleman's doings all day, except when he had to open the door to a client: and at evening he was taken back to Coke Villa, where a bed had been contrived for him in a curious triangular cupboard under the top stairs, after a failure to establish a species of berth on one of the upper bins of the wine-cellar.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE STEWARD'S STORY. SPROUTS TURNS TO LITERATURE.

THE jolly man was as good as his word. He took the little party all on board the steam-boat, and they finished the evening very merrily in the cabin, until Miss Twits who had been unconsciously led into thoughts of inconstant rovers and gallant barks, from their floating position, having looked a great many times at Bessy Payne, at last said it was time to go. Sprouts and the jolly man of course saw them home : and the jolly man's brother begged Tom would come back there and sleep that night, as he did not appear very clear in his notions of a lodging. But his good-hearted friend told him to call in the morning, and he would see what could be done ; and that it would be all right, and if it wasn't he would make it right, with many other bits of comfort which Sprouts religiously believed in. And so he returned with a light heart to the steamer.

If you have never passed a summer night upon the river as it flows through the metropolis—and the chances are that circumstances have never offered you the chance of doing so—you cannot conceive how much of the beautiful, and even romantic, still hangs about our cold common-place money-getting London. You must wait until the roar of swarming life has been stilled in the streets and on the bridges ; and all traffic has ceased upon the water : until the house-fires have nearly all died away, and the moon is shining down from the clear heaven upon the sleeping city. And then Venice itself is scarcely more beautiful. For the outlines of the very warehouses, softened in the tranquil light, assume picturesque forms that might be palaces with less effect ; and the spires of the churches, with their vanes faintly gleaming, rise sharp and white in the air ; whilst along the banks, mingling with the lamps, here and there, red fires break out, reflected quiveringly in the water, and throwing the forms of those who move about them in giant shadows upon the adjoining buildings, seen on the open wharves, and through the arches, in the bluish misty distance, when the other lights become mere specks. Lesser lights, too, twinkle like eyes from the heads of ships that lie in clusters on the river, which flows on, breaking the reflection of the moon into dancing flashes, and gurgling and eddying with a subdued noise by the sides of the craft, and the piles and buttresses that divide its course. The appearance of a great city in the repose of night is always impressive ; but chiefly so when viewed from the water, as the feeling of entire isolation flings an additional charm of interest over it.

Sprouts, on his return, sat some little time with the brother of his hearty friend on the deck ; and under the influence of convivial drinks they got very communicative. The brother was the type of a steward, which attentive race appears to be as distinct a class of humanity, as gipsies, Highlanders, American Indians or Leicester Square foreigners.

For they have all got full faces, light curly hair, and barytone voices : they all wear jackets and trowsers, and trodden out dancing-pumps ; and their clothes appear to be always too small for them : in fact they are the best illustrations of tight-fits we know of. River travellers always associate them with pallid cigars and pint bottles of stout—channel voyagers only know them as connected with brandy and basins : and men of the world generally look upon them as a cross between a boatswain and a licensed victualler, living always in a small closet of jingling wine-glasses and cold ham, except when they carry boiled legs of mutton across the decks, which have been to all appearances cooked in the paddle-wheels.

"That isn't bad brandy—is it?" asked the steward of Sprouts, as Tom put down his glass with a relishing smack. "You couldn't get any like that ashore, if you paid ever so much for it."

"I dare say not," said Sprouts : albeit he did not clearly understand why.

"No," continued the steward, "that's the real B. B. B."

"Ah! Betts's," said Sprouts with a knowing expression.

"No," replied the steward : "quite t'other; Bourgois' Best Boulone. Were you ever at Boulone?"

"Lord bless you," said Tom, "I was never ten miles from London, except when I went to Hampton Court with Bessy Payne."

"Nice little girl that is too," continued the man. "I never heard of a steam-boat steward having a wife and family, and don't believe there ever was an instance, else she'd be a comfortable pardner. I thought so ever so many times to-night : that I did," he continued, as he stopped the tobacco in his pipe with his little finger.

"But how about the brandy," interrupted Sprouts, apparently very anxious to change the subject.

"Oh : aye the brandy—so it was," said the steward. "And you said you didn't know Boulone. That's odd now—not to know Boulone! But different people has different opinions, and stewards don't know everything : that's to say your regular ones. I don't see my way clearly with a latch-key, and shouldn't exactly know what to do with a door mat : four-post beds too are not exactly the things to get me to sleep ; they are so uncommon steady. But I forgot the brandy—well, you know, that never paid duty : don't you see?"

And to elucidate Sprouts in his perception, the steward put his tongue in his cheek and made a noise like drawing a cork : after which he winked, and pointed with his thumb over his shoulder, in which direction Tom looked, but saw nothing except the lion on the top of the brewery, and that but hazily in the distance. However, he nodded his head and said :

"Oh yes—I see."

"Smuggled, you know," added the steward. "Very good : I see you understand. Now I'll tell you something about smuggling or something next door to it, that it puts me in mind of."

And getting his pipe into a good glow, he took a very comfortable pull at his tumbler, and so commenced.

The Steward's Story.

If you don't know Boulogne, it isn't much use asking you about it : so I'd better tell you what it's like to begin with. The port seems built entirely of houses from Dutch toy boxes ; and the houses are all hotels : and the hotels are all white Venetian shutters and steep roofs, with big hooks sticking out of them, as if to catch any body who was sliding down. If you sit down on the port, you may lay any bet that you will be able to count a dozen dogs before a minute is over : and if you go to the edge of the quay you'll be sure to see a French soldier guarding a tub, as though all the safety of France was inside it : and a steamer to start for London at twelve o'clock that night, lying dry in an empty harbour and a large boat full of foreign fish, and foreigner fishermen, who do nothing but swear at one another, as if they were going to cut everybody else's throats every minute. But they never do : it's only their way : for the French can't do anything without making a noise about it ; and they can't do anything alone. And so the port of Boulogne appears always in a state of uncivil war, especially up at the corner, which as the man in the play says, has a very ancient and fish-like smell, and puts you in mind of Billingsgate in a fancy dress, kept a little too long.

The inside of the houses is curious, too. They've all got red and white window curtains, and fancy-fair clocks. All the door handles seem to have once belonged to cabs : and you can't open or shut any of the windows without pinching your fingers or breaking the glass ; and if you lock yourself in your bed-room, the chances are ten to one, that you'll never be able to let yourself out again. And you must learn to wash in a white pie-dish with a small milk-pot for a jug, and a doyley with fringed edges for a towel ; and if you're lucky you'll get a saucer to put your soap and nail-brush in. But that's only in the best houses.

However, it's a very jolly place for all that ; and there's a heap of jolly people—English too—live all about it : and it's uncommon cheap, with capital bathing and first rate brandy (of which you're tasting a sample) and pleasant walks ; and in consequence no end of people go over there every summer. This accounts for all the hotels : and if they go on starting them as they have done, every traveller will soon be able to have one all to himself. Well—some time ago, I was a sort of agent to the steam-boats, and I used to dine every day at a table-d'hôte—that means a hot ordinary—at a house on the port they called the Hotel d'Albion. The master was a Frenchman, a smart fellow enough, although people said he was outrunning the constable : and so it proved at last, when he ran clean away altogether. But his house was always full ; for he used to go backwards and forwards in the boats on purpose to tout for customers ; by which he nailed them always long before they landed, so that they in a measure escaped being carried into all sorts of hotels at once, on their arrival, by opposition commissioners. Some only stopped for a night, on their way to Paris : others made

about a month of it, to be talked of at home, as "being on the continent," and one or two seemed to live there perpetually; and amongst these last was Mr. Waverley Bellville. I don't think that was his name; it sounded too like a bad actor's in a country play-bill; but he was always called so.

Mr. Waverley Bellville was one of those topping gents you see in the slips of the play-houses at half-price; and now and then in Regent Street, and sometimes at late taverns. He wore mustachios, and turned his wristbands over his cuffs, and had a pink under-waistcoat, and a stock-pin made like a horse-shoe. He used to tell us of no end of grand people he knew in England: and offered shooting to everybody at his moors in the North, so liberally that if they had all gone, there would have been some dreadful accidents, and all the visitors would have shot one another, from being so thick, however big the place was. He made friends with all the new people as they came; and as the *table d'hôte* was always changing its guests, he got a pretty large circle of acquaintance during the season, to all of whom he gave introductions to his friends in Paris. I often thought about what his friends in Paris were. They must have got something out of their visitors, or they would have been eaten out of house and home; if there is such a thing as home, abroad.

When the boats from England come into Boulone harbour, there's always a crowd of people to go down to look at the passengers, and one fine day, Mr. Waverley Bellville was amongst the number, as the *Harlequin* was being brought up alongside the port. As the passengers got out, to go up to the Custom-house inside the chains, there was one young gentleman looked very poorly indeed, and from his dress had evidently made up, as he would have gone to Gravesend on a holiday, and found the channel somewhat different. Mr. Bellville watched him into the Douane at the front door, and contrived to meet him at the other, where they come out to be pulled to pieces by the touters.

"Pavilion Hotel, Sir!" cried one voice. "Hôtel Bedford!" said another. "I'll see your luggage all right, Sir, and carry it over to the Hôtel de Paris," shouted a third; "so you can go there, quite comfortable."

And then a regular mob of scouts from the smaller houses nearly crushed him in their anxiety to secure him—as the boy did the butterfly in the spelling-book.

"Now, stand back, will you?" said Mr. Bellville, in a very lordly tone. "I beg your pardon," he continued, turning to the new comer; "you are an Englishman?"

"Oh yes, yes: I am an Englishman," replied the traveller, very glad to find somebody inclined to come to his rescue.

"And a stranger, I think," observed Mr. Bellville blandly. "Will you allow me to ask—have you decided upon your hotel?"

"No I have not. I don't know where to go to more than—"

But before he could finish, at this expression the whole pack of touters fell on him again, each trying to out-cry the others, until the row when horses are coming in for the Derby was nothing to it.

"Now—will—you—keep—back?" said Mr. Bellville again; quite slowly and coolly, like the nobs usually talk,—because not having anything else to do they have plenty of time for the words to come out. "If you will allow a countryman to recommend you, you will find the Hotel d'Albion the best. You speak French?"

"No—that is—I can read it very well."

"Ah! very good," said Mr. Bellville. "You won't want to speak it at the Hotel d'Albion; all the servants are English. That's it—allow me—close at hand."

And before the new comer knew where he was, Mr. Bellville had marched him over to the Hotel d'Albion, and recommended him to have some soup with plenty of cayenne, and hot brandy and water, in the dining-room.

"What ees yournem, sare?" asked the landlord. Had he spoken double Chinese upside-down he could not have been more unintelligible to the stranger.

"Pardon me," said Mr. Bellville, "he wants to know your name. If you will favour me with it and your keys, I will look after your luggage at the douane."

"Caddy," replied the stranger; "they're marked T. Caddy."

"Teacaddy?" echoed Mr. Bellville; "ah—I'll find them. Don't distress yourself."

And Mr. Bellville whisked over to the custom-house and returned in a few minutes, followed by a tribe of old women with gold chandelier drops hanging from their ears, and bare legs, carrying Mr. Caddy's boxes, which to look at that number you'd have thought were meant to go to Nova Scotia. Mr. Caddy declared he never could repay the other's kindness. I think he did though, in the end; and handsomely too.

Well—to get on: they became great friends; and Mr. Bellville wouldn't leave him, ever. He taught him to play dominos and *écarté* at the Café Vermond, and introduced him to pleasant fellows at the Hotel des Bains; and took him to balls at the Etablissement; and went about with him in his walks, for Mr. Caddy was not a very good Frenchman. He would try to talk it though, until the French maid at the hotel begged he would speak English, because then she thought she could understand him. And I half recommended him to walk about the pier every day, for an hour, in the wind, with his mouth open, to catch the accent. So that, you see, he was not very sharp; but he'd a good deal of the other; and this was just what Mr. Bellville wanted.

Everybody who goes to Boulone buys a lot of things they don't want, just because they are there. They could get nearly all in the Lowther Arcade, at the same price; but they like to say they brought them from France; so they load themselves with ivory brooches, and sample bottles of cognac, and sometimes whole sets of tea-things, and an entire perfumer's shop. And, as the time arrived for Mr. Caddy to think of going home again, he caught the usual fever. Under Mr. Bellville's kind recommendations, he got watches, and chains, and fans, and gloves,

and cambric handkerchiefs, enough to start a bazaar. There were by far too many things to smuggle; so he had them all properly packed, to be declared, and at last the time came for him to be off.

Now, nobody can leave Boulone without a permit—although you can come into it very easily; which makes it a sort of mouse-trap to catch travellers. These are little certificates, which they give you about an hour before the boat goes. Mr. Bellville made himself very useful to the last, seeing that Mr. Caddy's treasures were taken every care of, and not shot down the slanting board in the usual rough way, which, if you have a carpet-bag full of eggs, or glass shades, or eau-de-Cologne, is sometimes awkward; and he also got the permit for him, and would walk down to the boat. The usual crowd of folks was there, to see their friends off, and run along by the side of the packet to the end of the pier: and the soldiers were on guard at the gangway; and people were asking strangers to post letters for them in London; and all was bustle, with a screaming *obligato* from the steamer.

"Let me see," said Mr. Bellville; "all right, I believe, and on board; eight things, counting the walking-stick. Where's the walking-stick with the amber top, and telescope, and knife and fork inside? I don't see the walking-stick."

"Why, I can't have left it at the hotel," exclaimed Mr. Caddy.

"I think you must have," said Mr. Bellville. "Where was it last? I'll go."

As he spoke, a boy began to ring the steam-boat bell, like mad.

"And the boat's off!" cried Mr. Caddy.

"Not a bit," answered Mr. Bellville. "That's the quarter-of-an-hour bell. Where did you have the stick last?"

"In my bed-room," said Mr. Caddy. "I recollect."

And so did Mr. Bellville; but he didn't say so; for he had let the other leave it there on purpose.

"There's time to get it," said Mr. Caddy. "Hold my coat, and mind the pocket-book—the permit's in it. I'll go; because I know where it is."

He rushed across the road in a great hurry to the hotel. The instant almost he had left, the word was given to cast off, for you see it had been the bell for starting. Mr. Bellville jumped on the end of the gangway just as they were moving it—thrust his permit into the hand of the gendarme; and slid like a lamplighter down on to the deck, quicker than ever William did in the song.

Round went the wheels and off went the *Harlequin* between the two piers towards the bar; but before she'd got half way out of the harbour Mr. Caddy was seen without his hat, and like a wild man, cutting along the jetty and calling out to the boat to stop—to the great delight of the people, who thought he was simply too late, and that was all. But the *Harlequin* was getting into a sharp trot, and wasn't in the habit of stopping for anybody; so poor Mr. Caddy flew on faster still, until he came to the end, when he had got to such a pitch of velocity and fright, that unable to stop himself he went right over the parapet into the sea.

Luckily there were lots of boats about, coming in with the tide, and they soon fished him up, for he was not a bad swimmer. But by the time he was on his legs again the *Harlequin* had pitched and tossed across the bar, and was turning off to the right for London, with Mr. Bellville on board, having charge of all Mr. Caddy's foreign treasures.

The poor gentleman went back to the hotel quite frantic. He waited very anxiously for the next posts, and went down to all the arrivals of the boats, but—it may seem odd to you—he never heard of Mr. Bellville again. All his money, which he had changed at Adam's for bank notes was in his pocket-book; so he was obliged to stay on, until he got fresh remittances from England. Mr. Bellville, himself, owed a long bill at the hotel; and at last they broke open his luggage left there; and—you wouldn't believe it—they found nothing in his boxes but sand, which he must have brought up in pocketfuls from the shore.

When I was steward of one of the Ostend boats I thought I saw Mr. Bellville one day going over to Belgium, to have something to do with a Brussels railway. I'm not sure; for he wore his hair different, and called himself Percy Rathbone, Esq., but that was the last time anything like him ever came across me. But I remembered all about the business; and what I says is this—if ever you go to Boulogne, and meet an Englishman at the *table d'hôte* of a second-rate hotel, who wears mustachios, speaks first-rate French, walks out in glazed boots, talks about great people in England, wants to be attentive, and seems fond of rings and chains: *don't have anything to do with him.*

As the story was concluded, and the grog finished also, Sprouts and his host retired to their berths, and slept like tops in their floating tenements. But they were up very early in the morning: for the boat was going down to Gravesend in good time. They, however, had breakfast together first, in the saloon, which was laid out for expected guests in great state, with the flowers and gold fish, who pass the greater part of their lives in vibrating and troubled waters: and on the table in the centre were large joints of cold beef and ruins of colossal hams, delightful to look at. Indeed, Tom had never had breakfast in such form before; and was almost afraid to use the coffee-pot, or ask the fat curly headed boy who must have been the steward's son, or if he was not ought to have been, for more meat. He contrived, nevertheless, to make a very tolerable meal from unwonted materials: and then, with many thanks on his part for the hospitality shown him, and many requests from the steward that he would hunt him up now and then, Tom started to have an interview with the jolly man, according to an address he had received.

He threaded various intricacies of Lambeth: and at last came to a large enclosure, with a row of stables down one side of it, and a public-house at the corner, which would have been a mews in a respectable

quarter of town, but over the water was simply a yard—position having affected its respectability. Having discovered that this was the place he was looking after, from an intelligent policeman, he walked through the gates, and came upon the most comical locality he had for a long time seen. And yet Sprouts was used to strange ones.

If the belief in the wondrous heroes of our nursery tales, which is so strong in green childhood, lasted throughout our lives—and we sometimes think it is a pity that it does not, were it only that we might, in trouble, and when driven into painful corners, support our own spirits on the hope that other benevolent ones would come in disguise to cheer us—then would a traveller have conceived from the first aspect of this yard, that he had heedlessly wandered into the dominions of a mighty ogre. For round the enclosure were ranged the most stupendous adjuncts to any wardrobe it was possible to conceive. There were hats ten feet high mounted on four wheels, as though from the difficulty of moving such mighty things: and vast Hessian boots, the tassels of which could have swept the sills of first floor windows. There were coffee-pots also, of shape and height, that had they been made of iron, might have been sent out as lighthouses to any foreign islands: and shoes, whose vast proportions rendered no longer apocryphal the story of the old woman who is once reported to have inhabited one with a family so numerous as to paralyze all her exertions to support them, and reduce her to the painful necessity of chastising them and sending them to rest after a supper of inferior soup, in her desperation. And elsewhere were towering placards—perfect houses made of large letters, also upon wheels; and fanciful pagodas and obelisks. And everything was so bewildering that Sprouts would scarcely have known what to have done, albeit many of these things were familiar to him, had he not perceived the jolly man sitting in a sort of shed, made of half a boat turned on its end, and smoking a pipe, with a comfortable looking jug before him, evidently never intended to hold anything else but good beer.

He soon saw Tom, and having performed a telegraphic piece of action, by holding up the jug with one hand, and beckoning to him with the other, he said:

“Well, Sprouts, how are you this morning, eh? Lively? Didn't suppose I was anything in this line, did you? Ha! ha! ha!”

And the jolly man was so tickled by his own good-temper, without requiring any absolute joke to start him, that he laughed outright. Whereat Tom laughed too, until at last they both joined in an uncontrollable burst which lasted well nigh a minute.

“Sit down—sit down on that tub,” said the jolly man, “and try my especial tap, brewed a purpose for me: I said to the brewer, says I, before I got it, ‘I say, Spiggy,’ says I, ‘your beer only wants another hop.’ ‘Why another hop?’ says he. ‘Because,’ says I, ‘then it would hop into water.’ Lor! and if you had a seen him how he looked! ‘Hop into water,’ says I: that’s what hit him. But he never sent it bad again. Ho! ho!”

And then the jolly man laughed again, and Sprouts, as a guest is always in duty bound to do, went into extacies at the pleasantry.

"You didn't know I was in this line, then?" repeated his friend, when he recovered his breath.

"Not at all," replied Tom, "but I've often seen them in the streets."

"Who hasn't?" said the jolly man. "I only ask you that: who hasn't? What a great day it was for England when these advertisements were started. I recollect it, as if it was yesterday—all along of the last lottery as ever was. Do you recollect that?"

Sprouts could just do so. He remembered pelting the owner of the "Six Thirty Thousands all in one day," as he went along Holborn in a revolving pagoda.

"I've got that very identical van," said the jolly man; "but it's seen strange speculations. I call it *The Gasper*, for, somehow or another, it never goes out now but to puff some speculation that is sure to fail. I do believe if I was to send out that van with a placard on it—'Great novelty! New £3 10s. per cent. annuities!! Dividends due January 5th, July 5th, and are usually paid a few days after!!! Be in time!!!' I do believe if I was to do that, the Bank of England would break the next day."

"Would it now?" asked Tom: but with very vague notions of the nature of the catastrophe.

"That it would," returned the jolly man decisively. "I've never known it otherwise. It set out with cheap coals after the lotteries: but they were all burnt out the first week apparently, and the company only gave me the sack. Then it told the people that there were millions of cloaks to be sold somewhere in Oxford Street, next to nothing; but I reckon the difficulty of finding nothing out cramped the sale, or else there must have been an uncommon rush, and they were all got rid of in a day. And then it started for a weekly paper. That was the worst of all."

And here the jolly man shook his head, laid down his pipe, and took a draught of beer to revive his spirits at the bare recollection of the event.

"That paper came out as the champion of the Poor Man," said Tom's friend; "but, somehow or another the editor overlooked me altogether—and I wasn't very well off at the time—and forgot to pay me. But he went in so generally for 'the People,' as he called 'em, that I suppose he forgot individuals. 'The People' must have been a blessed ungrateful lot to be sure; for they didn't pay him no attention in return. But, as I said, 'the People' care a hanged sight more for police reports and a pint of beer than all attempts to 'meliorate' them. You're a young beginner: take my advice; never have anything to do with philanthropists and their pets, 'the People.' They're all a shy lot, depend upon it."

"I won't," said Sprouts, trying to look politically economical.

"No, don't," went on the jolly man. "For at last all the champions

of 'the People' got quarrelling one with another ; and all those who wrote such good stories about Christian feelings, and virtuous mechanics would have cut one another's throats if they had got the chance. But I was the sufferer : for I never got paid for all their enlarged sheets, and portraits of popular grumblers which they gave away, and supplements gratis—all of which that van advertised. I regularly chuckled though when 'the People's' champions had a row amongst themselves. There wasn't any civil war, though in consequence ; all the masses they said they'd moved behaved quite quiet on the occasion. But I never got paid. However that don't concern you much, Tom ; nor me neither, now. Oh ! what's the use of sighing ? Have some more beer."

And then Sprouts and the jolly man pledged one another again.

"And now about yourself," said the friend. "I've been thinking about you all night. Do you know much about fireworks?"

"Crackers ;" answered Sprouts. "I should think so!"

"Ah, yes ; but fancy things I mean ; rockets and gerbs, and Chinese flower-pots."

"No—not much of them," said Tom ; "they're too dear."

"Well—perhaps it's luckier as it is," returned the jolly man ; "or, otherwise, I might have got you a powder-monkey's sort of berth with my brother-in-law. He makes fireworks over by Bedlam. We are not very good friends though ; for he won't let me smoke a pipe in his workshop anyhow."

"It might be dangerous," said Tom.

"That's just it," replied the other. "He's been blow'd into the opposite first floor half a dozen times, as it is ; and went up with a dozen packets of his own rockets last November on a very short notice. He's always getting into rows with the neighbours too, for sending their shop fronts, and the things they sell, into the back parlours, and sometimes clean out of the door behind."

"I should not much like that place," said Sprouts. "I wonder he has never been killed."

"Oh—he's used to it," said the jolly man. "His father was a waiter at Vauxhall ; and by his interest, he learned to stand powder early, in combustible temples of Victory on the firework ground. Well—never mind him ; I've got another chance for you ;—it's in the literary line, with a sprinkling of snuff."

Tom's mind immediately reverted to the ingenious exercises for mental ingenuity which he had seen on tobacco papers. But he was deceived.

"There's a good old body—a lone widow that keeps a library—who asked me the other day if I knew a smart active lad as could fetch her papers and serve in the shop for her. How about that?"

"Well," said Tom ; "I'm sure I'm active ; and I'll be smart as soon as I can afford it." As he spoke he gave a glance at his attire.

"Oh—never mind that," said the jolly man, divining his sentiments. "It strikes me you'll do very well. You mustn't look for a great deal of money, you know, but it will be better than nothing for a little time."

Come ; finish your beer, and I'll go with you. You wouldn't like to drive one of these vans, I suppose. It's very lively—you see a deal of life, too, in the course of the day."

"I can't drive very well," said Sprouts, "I never tried anything but Skittler's Taglioni."

The speech required a little explanation : and when this was given the jolly man went on :—

"Because, if you had been a whip, I could soon have found something for you to do. There's the Golden Canister hasn't got a driver just at present ; or you might have had the Red Boot if you'd liked it better. I think the Shappo Fransay's the most comfortable though : that hat makes a perfect comfort in a storm ; and saved the life of one of my drivers once, when he was blown over Waterloo Bridge in a gale of wind. It turned right up, and he floated in it down to Quecnhithe."

"Are they very difficult to drive ?" asked Sprouts, who had a slight predilection for the style of life their guidance called for.

"Oh no," said the jolly man : "you never can see where you're going to turn to ; but that's nothing. The great thing is to know when to stop ; and that should always be at a crossing, or in a turnpike. Because then, you know, it gives the people time to read the bills. I had a man once who would always undertake to stop six omnibusses, a dozen cabs, two waggons, and a gross of foot-people, in half a minute. But there's not many like him."

Tom felt that it would be sometime before he could arrive at that pitch of perfection in the conduct of an advertising cart ; so he resigned himself to the guidance of the jolly man, who—after he had given a few directions to the charioteer of the Coffee Pot, and decided upon the course of the revolving pagoda, now starting forth with a prospectus of a new periodical, which subsequently ran a month,—led him through some back streets, until he arrived at the library, to the owner of which Tom was about to be introduced.

She was a little withered up old woman, with huge spectacles, that gave her somewhat the look of a pantomime witch ; and she appeared from some concealed corner in the same mysterious and sudden manner as one of those characters might be supposed to do. What she wore her spectacles for was difficult to conceive. It could hardly have been for ornament ; and it certainly was not for use, because when she looked at remote objects she bent her head down and peered over the glasses ; and when she wanted to regard things near her, she pushed them up away altogether upon her forehead.

The jolly man appeared to know her very well ; and he recommended Tom so stoutly, that before five minutes were over he was engaged at three shillings a week to go after the morning papers, open the shop, mind it when the proprietress was engaged, and make himself generally useful. He was also offered a small but compact sleeping apartment, under the counter, which, with his vague notions of bedding, was a very snug retreat ; and the pump in the court furnished a contiguous bath for the purposes of the toilet—very refreshing indeed on bright summer morn

ings, when the air was pure, and the neighbourhood still asleep ; and inducing mental fortitude and self-victory in the depth of winter, when it was wound round with hay-bands, and surrounded with slides that rendered an approach to it a matter of some enterprize, the energy of the boys to "keep the pot a bilin'" usually ending in the destruction of the pitcher.

"I'll be bound for him," said the jolly man, "that you'll find him a good one. And I'm glad to serve him : as the saying is, 'take care of your friends, you know, and your relations will take care of themselves.' I suppose he can begin his work at once."

There was nothing to say against this ; and Sprouts having his wardrobe in his hat, (which was an admirable arrangement, inasmuch as it was conveniently carried, and preserved the hat in a sort of symmetry which the fire-wood splints were beginning to fail in doing,) had nothing to go after. So he was immediately set to clean the windows outside ; an employment which did not give at first very good notions of his despatch ; inasmuch as there were so many periodicals and pictures to look at, that at times he forgot his work altogether, until the cold foggy grey eyes of the old lady looked after him.

The shop which Sprouts was to have partly under his control was situated in a little narrow court, whose chief use appeared to be to let people out of one dirty back-thoroughfare into another a little worse, neither of which were apparently approached from anywhere else. And yet there was a constant tide of persons threading the labyrinth who must have come from somewhere, and had evidently notions of an ultimate destination ; but they came out of the dark, like images in a magic lanthorn, and vanished into it again, precluding all conjectures as to their purpose.

The court was a great place for children : and fine weather brought them out like flies, so thickly that it was wonderful to think where they got to when it was wet. They were a race of pigmies constantly at war with mankind : and upsetting the peace of strangers by countless machines calculated to seriously maim and injure all invaders of their domains. They had iron hoops, which tied the legs of passengers in hopeless knots and threw them down : and mosquito-like shuttlecocks that flew in their faces ; and horrid bits of wood, sharp at each end, which on being struck went in unintended directions and stuck in the eyes of the traveller. They also kicked bits of tile and oyster-shells against his legs, when performing their war dances on a chalked-out diagram on the pavement : and would rush round corners in large bodies meeting him whenever he approached, driving his elbows through windows, and his feet irrevocably between area gratings. They all had white hair, and never wore hats nor bonnets : and their notion of money was vague. Yet there were one or two shops in this court : the other houses were lodgings, whose doors were always open. There was a coffee-shop, in the window of which the same three eggs in the worsted moss basket—once green but now blanchéd buff—had remained in the memory of the oldest boy : so had the empty tea-pot : so had the

Weekly Dispatch, semi-transparent and coffee-stained, that hung over the blind. There was also a green-grocer's, who always had oysters out of season as big as cheese-plates: and never sold anything but rhubarb and rattling walnuts—at least in the vegetable line: for otherwise the owner dealt in pale cakes of facetious devices—horses, fashionable ladies, and wheelbarrows—which were so stale that they eat like pumice stone, and would have been cruel things to devour in bed. There were also tall tumblers covered with old tea-pot lids, full of hazy bulls'-eyes and small barbers'-poles of peppermint: and a corner was appropriated to feeble tops, mispherical balls, hatchment-like kites, that could not by any possibility be made to fly, but when started whirled round and round until they shattered against the ground; and the evil-spirited shuttlecocks before alighted to, which like the Australian crooked missiles never went where they were intended, but lodged over shop-windows, and darted down areas, and flew over walls, and vanished down ping holes, and in fact brought woe with them wherever they went.

The establishment in which Sprout was chiefly interested was, however, *the shop of the court*. It was presumed to have been originally a tobacconist's, who late in life took to Sunday papers and drinking, and neglecting his first calling, turned over the management of the literature to his wife, under whose superintendence the snuff and cigars were gradually driven more and more backward, as civilization pushed the American Indians from their hunting grounds, until the man died and his relict gave up all her attention to letters, retaining a few memorials of the original trade, in the shape of canisters of dry pungent dust, samples of such snuff-boxes as you knock down from the sticks at the races; and cigars, that, like rolls of papyrus, or the drums and banners in the Windsor Castle guard-room, looked as if they would tumble to pieces the instant they were touched, from very antiquity.

There was always somebody looking into the window of "*Smedlar's Library*" as it was now called; for there was plenty to see. There were so many cheap periodicals that the wonder was, not, who read them, but where the people came from who wrote them. Well thumbed novels were opened enticingly at exciting pages, and displayed flat up against the panes, with the intelligence that they were "*Lent to read*" on the top of them; but sometimes the labels got confused, and the intelligence that an old brown-letter volume was "*Just out*" shook the faith of wary spectators, except it could be supposed to refer to its flickering popularity. The window was enclosed by theatrical portraits of heroes in very determined attitudes. Mr. Huntley as El Hyder was violently opposed to Mr. Macready as William Tell; and there was a horse-combat between Kerim and Sanballat of a fierceness that threatened to annihilate everything.

The library window was subject to various epidemics at certain seasons of the year. As soon as Christmas had turned, an inflammatory rush of Valentines broke out all over the window, turning respectable trades into ridicule, or conveying taunts and reflections calculated to wound





Illustration by the artist.

sensitive feelings. Then, as the poet's month of May drew nigh, nothing was seen but song books; these were followed by cheap steamb-boat guides; next, for the longer evenings, dozens of romances, all continued simultaneously; and when winter approached, sheets of Christmas-pieces came from their twelvemonths' lurking place, as well as riddles, in such profuse display, that a single pennyworth of 'nuts-to-crack' would have shut up all the pretensions of the Sphinx for ever, and made *Cedipus* himself look exceedingly contemptible.

All sorts of odd people came to the library, who amused Sprouts exceedingly, and sometimes astonished him for a little while. He found that, as every person, however unattractive, has some admirer, so every subject or style, however generally unpromising, is sure to get certain readers. Ghosts, however, enjoyed the greatest popularity, and next to them, murderers—where the two were combined, the hit was enormous. Broken hearts were not bad; indeed misery generally was found to provide the lightest entertainment of the masses; and all theatrical subjects found ready readers. In fact, the more anything partook of the artificial and unnatural, the more it was sought after.

Tom was soon uncommonly happy. When he went after the papers, he sometimes stopped to have a chat and a potato with Skittler; and when he was at home, and had a little leisure, he read the books of the shop. But as these commonly consisted of various numbers and volumes of different novels, the impression left was somewhat confusing, and he amalgamated all the heroes and heroines to a great degree. He did not intend to tell Bessy Payne what he was doing, until he felt quite settled for good in his new place; but this determination was upset in a very agreeable manner.

For one afternoon, whilst he was left in charge of the establishment, and was learning a comic song behind the counter, two customers came into the shop. Sprouts had got as far as—

"For Adam was the first man,
And by a coincidence queer,
Why I'm—"

and here he stopped short in his intended avowal of who he was, and pushed the book under a little theatre that stood on the counter, in much confusion.

"Is the last number of 'Mabel the Mildewed' out?" asked one of the customers.

Almost before Sprouts raised his eyes to reply, he heard a faint scream, rather of astonishment than terror, and a voice he knew very well exclaimed,

"My goodness gracious, Tom! Why you're not here?"

"Bessy!" cried Sprouts—for it was the little milliner. "Bessy! Here's a one!"

"But it can't be you, Tom," said the pretty girl. "You're not here, now, really, are you?"

"Not a bit of it," said Sprouts. "I'm somewhere else. I should think you could tell that. Oo—o—o!"

And here Tom made a curious grimace at Bessy, as one does to babies preparatory to expressing cannibal propensities respecting them; and then, putting his hand on the counter, in some remarkable manner vaulted clean over it—knocking over the theatre in the performance—and stood at Bessy's side. The chances are, if nobody had been by, he would have kissed her, then and there. But Miss Twits was her companion, and—like people who have been crossed in love generally—was of an extreme propriety.

"And you never told me, Tom, what had become of you," said Bessy, almost reproachfully. "And there we wondered, and wondered; and I used to watch the postman every time, and listen to the knocks coming nearer the door, and then missing it, and then you can't tell how disappointed I used to be. Didn't we, Letty?"

"We did, indeed," said Miss Twits, mournfully, as she recalled the times when she watched in the same manner for the sovereign which her heartless lover had never repaid. And then shaking her head and sighing, she listlessly turned over the leaves of a romance lying on the counter.

"But how did you happen to come here?" asked Sprouts.

"How did we happen to come, Tom? Why, we have always had our books from here. You are close to us, you know: close."

"But I don't know it, Bessy; how should I? I never came through such a difficult place since we were at Hampton Court maze. There's one thing; now you've got me here you can keep me, for I'm sure I never shall find my way out again."

"Well, I never; now, Tom—I'm sure you're joking."

"Upon my Bluchers and collar I'm not!" said Tom; but in spite of such a serious oath, he forgot that he went to the regions of the Strand for his newspapers every morning. "And so your house is really near here?"

"Only two streets off, Tom; under the archway, and by the old iron shop, near the public-house where there's always somebody tipsy. It's not a very nice way. To think you never knew it! My!"

"Oh, I should have found it out, soon," said Sprouts; "but I beg your pardon, Miss Twits; you wanted a book. Let's see—Mabel the Mouldy——"

"Mildewed," said Miss Twits, somewhat indignant.

"Ah, Mildewed; so it was," replied Tom, who had only formed some association with a damp cellar respecting the work in question. "No," he added, looking along the shelves; "Mabel's out—gone somewhere near Bedlam. But here's a beautiful story—'The Light of Other Days; or the Heart that never felt Renewing.' It's a great favourite, and makes every body cry so—you can't think."

"I'll take that," said Miss Twits, eagerly. "But this is only the fifth number."

"Oh! that's no matter," answered Tom. "The great advantage of all these stories is, that you can begin them anywhere—at the end if you like—and read them backwards. It all comes to the same, for each part begins and ends with a murder or a suicide. The authors are obliged to put two deaths in every number; else they wouldn't get paid."

Miss Twits was caught by the picture, which represented a gentleman in tights and a feather, pressing a lady to tempt the waves in his gallant bark. He had also a guitar, being a useful thing to go to sea with in an open boat. And behind a tree was another gentleman, in a cloak, like those which foreign professors wear about the Haymarket in cold weather, of an apocryphal number of yards round the bottom, the corner of which was thrown over the shoulder; but permitted a clutched dagger to be seen, which was evidently intended to do the first gentleman grievous bodily harm. And the landscape was that curious mixture of wild country, gorgeous porticos and curtains out of doors only seen on the drop scenes of theatres.

"I will take this," said Miss Twits; "and Bessy, I shall go on to—you know. So when you get home, see about the tea. Good bye, Mr. Sprouts."

Tom returned her adieu with great politeness; but as soon as she was gone, went through various grimaces and comic attitudes, which, as Bessy observed, "quite frightened her; how could he now?"

"And so this is your new place, Tom, is it?" she said, as soon as she recovered her breath. "And—you'll tell me, you know—how much money do you get?"

"Well, I shan't die of apoplexy," said Tom; "I'm to have three shillings a week, and find myself. I get bed here, to be sure—and board," he added, knocking the counter to enforce his wit. "Board—don't you see, Bessy; it's a joke. Ah! I forgot, you don't know a great deal in that line."

"Oh! I'm sure I do, Tom," replied Bessy, almost angry at having her powers of appreciation questioned. "But only three shillings a week? It seems very little. It would hardly do for me, you know; and then you—you're so clever!"

"And eat so much," added Tom. "I can't help it, Bessy; you know it's not my fault. What does your living cost you? Just tell me, as a friend, you know; as I told you."

"You wouldn't guess, Tom. Now, try."

"Oh, eversomuch!"

"Now, that's no answer. I'll tell you. I can live for five shillings a week; because you know I have not much to pay for lodging. I came to Miss Twits for six months; and then I learn to make things, and she has my services; but now, I've only two to go. Well, I have one loaf a week, and that costs eightpence—nice country bread, that comes round in a cart. Oh, it is so nice, you can't think—quite up to Sunday.

And then chops, Tom, for meat ; we know the price of chops—don't we ?”

“ Rather !” said Tom, as he thought of Hampton Court again, winking, and looking very wicked, and taking Bessy's little hand in his, “ And how about coffee ?”

“ Oh, we don't have coffee,” Bessy answered, laughing. “ We don't have coffee, because—you will laugh so—because we havn't got a coffee-pot. For Letty says she can't afford one ; and I'm sure if she can't, I can't.”

And the very notion of their poverty appeared so funny, that Bessy went off quite into a hearty fit of laughter.

“ So we have tea, Tom,” she continued, when this burst of merriment had subsided—and it was a nice, clear, light-hearted laugh, that a man used to artificial hilarity might have enjoyed, as any one pent up in a city swallows the fresh country air into his lungs with a large draught. “ So we have tea, Tom—a quarter of a pound ; and do you know, it lasts us a fortnight.”

“ And yet, Bessy, with this saving, how you do both turn out !”

“ But then see, Tom, how little dress costs ! Things are so very cheap when they're well made, and set well.”

“ And there might be a worse figure than your's, Bessy. Turn round.”

“ Oh, for shame, Tom !”

“ Yes ; now just turn round—right round—only once. Lor, Bessy, you're very nice.”

“ I wish everybody thought so, Tom !”

“ But ain't I everybody ? Didn't I ought to be everybody ? Oh dear ! oh wlaw ! oh gwacious !”

And here Sprouts, who had been great in half price galleries, imitated the tone and manner of Mr. Buckstone, when that popular comedian is putting on the manners of one with a desponding affection.

“ But don't you find your bed-room very uncomfortable ?” asked Bessy, quite embarrassed, as she looked at the counter, in the endeavour to divert the conversation, which she did not wish changed.

“ Oh no ; it's capital,” said Sprouts. “ I've a regular mattress of useful knowledge, and a pillow of what they call back stock—things that don't sell. I wonder I don't dream of them all, and get the nightmare.”

“ How nice it is, now you are so near us,” observed Bessy, not exactly comprehending the meaning of the last speech : “ so different from that nasty old Grudge's chambers. I wish we were nearer still.”

“ Perhaps I may be, some day, Bessy ; when Miss Twits has a spare room to let. What do you think a room in her house would be—up high, quite a cock-loft, you know ?”

“ Perhaps three shillings a week,” said Bessy.

“ Three : well, there's no knowing—who can tell. Stop : I've three shillings a week now ; that would do for food : and I could earn three,

lots of other ways—writing over hours for one. There we have it, except clothes.”

“Oh, never mind clothes, Tom,” cried Bessy.

“Miss Payne!” exclaimed Tom, assuming a grave aspect. “Where do you expect to go to. No—I couldn’t have thought—I never did!”

And here Sprouts pretended to be terribly ashamed, and concealed his face with a penny paper, as some utterly aboriginal notion entered his head. But suddenly he recovered his composure in a singularly quick manner, as he added to Bessy, in very polite tones, handing her a book—

“The ‘Brigand of Bagshot’ is not at home, Miss; but this is a very pleasing little work, if you will allow me to recommend it.”

The little milliner might have been astonished at the sudden change, if she had not seen, almost at the same instant, the owner of the establishment enter the shop, and march round the counter. Bessy took the hint and the book together, and then bowed to Sprouts, and left the shop: indeed they parted, as Miss Twits would have observed, as though they had never met. But it was a great stroke of policy: and the old lady was pleased with what she conceived to be the powers of recommendation in her new assistant.

Sprouts had a light supper that night of dusty wheelks from the Kennington Road, washed down with some bright cold water from the pump, which welled up too deep for the heat and smoke of the metropolis to affect it. And then he retired to his literary couch, and instead of the night-mare dreamt all night of Bessy Payne, and that he kept Gudge in a cage, and poked him with a steel-pen whenever he liked; until the policeman rang him up to start for Printing House Square the next morning; and fight for his copies of “The Times” in the retired area of that important locality.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GUDGES PLUNGE INTO SOCIETY, WHICH MRS. HAMPER PARTICIPATES IN.

SOMEBODY once observed—and the observation did him credit, whoever it was—that the dearest things in the world were neighbour’s eyes, for they cost everybody more than anything else contributing to housekeeping.

And certainly if we did not do things for other people’s opinions rather than our own comfort, we might find out “how to live on a hundred a year,” very readily. The potatoes would turn out as hot and mealy from the crockery as from the silver vegetable dish; and the small trouble of snuffing would get us as good a light from the domestic tallow as from the patrician wax. As goodly liquor would gurggle from

the common bottle, as from the heavy cut-glass decanter, and we should not mind if we broke it ; serviceable great coats would still keep out the cold long after their fashion had passed ; physician's chariots would no longer be regarded as a necessary amulet to chase away suffering. But the neighbour's eyes exact these things, and they are obliged to be.

So with an increased establishment did the ambitious heart of Mrs. Gudge enlarge ; and no sooner was Christopher comfortably settled down into his green clothes, with their fertile crop of silver peas, than that lady felt his mission was not only to assist Sarah, but to be paraded before the great world as an evidence of superior respectability. And she began by making him walk behind her, on which occasion she would purchase bulky articles for the delight of having him to carry them after. And when by chance she was out alone, and met a friend going to call upon her, she would walk back with him, or her, as the case might be, to Coke Villa ; and instead of, as heretofore, turning a handle in the door, and letting herself in, she would knock loudly, that Christopher might answer it—having first ascertained that he was not cleaning knives in his shirt-sleeves, by certain inferences and knowledge of localities.

The Olive also took a rise in life, for he was furnished with a child's chaise of his own, something like a plate-rack upon wheels, into which, being with much difficulty wedged, Christopher had to draw him on fine afternoons about certain thoroughfares, always finishing with strict orders to go round Brompton Square—in at one gate, round the end, and out at the other, that the curious inhabitants might inquire to whom the turn-out belonged ; to which end Christopher was enjoined to draw the chaise close to the iron railings, and not along the pavement under the windows, where they could not see him. This, however, was an employment not altogether disagreeable to our little man, for he sometimes got weary of the kitchen ; and in spite of the questions which the rude boys made at first as to the terms upon which he would part with different components of his wardrobe, without various appendages, such as buttons, collars, and the like, he rather liked going out. And when Mrs. Gudge could repose greater confidence in him, she sent him even as far as the Park, where he got opportunities of looking at the great world in their carriages. One day, Sir Frederick Arden's passed, and the little boy stared at it as he had done at the others. Had either party known whom they were so near, they would possibly have looked at each other with deeper interest.

"G.," said Mrs. Gudge one evening, to her husband, "last Tuesday was a fortnight we dined with the Flackers."

"And glad it's over," said Mr. Gudge. "The worst dinner I ever made in my life. There wasn't a drop of beer in the room."

"It isn't the right thing," said the lady. "I told you so ; but you would ask for it."

"But I know they have beer from the public-house every day," Mr. Gudge went on to say, "when they're by themselves."

"Yes ; I daresay that's true," replied his wife. "But then you know people never live by themselves as they do when they've got

parties. If they did, there would be no occasion to give any ; only it's a duty we owe to society."

"What! Not to let people do as they like, and drink beer when they want it?" asked Mr. Gudge, sharply, as he looked up from something he was studying, very dreadful and crackling, written upon parchment. "Of all curses on society, dinner parties are the worst."

"Lord! G.," observed his wife; "what do you mean?"

"I know what I mean," continued Mr. Gudge, still angry. "I know I mean a dinner party; and I know what a dinner party is. It's this. You've a dreary half hour of unpunctuality, with a dreary set of idiots. You take soup you don't like, because you're afraid you won't get any fish: and if you do get any fish, it's quite cold; and the melted butter and anchovy never comes round until you've got your saddle of mutton; so you pretend that you usually eat it with salt alone, and that in fact you like it best; and break your French roll into pieces to carry on time and make believe you're occupied, when you feel you're overlooked. Do you call that comfort, I ask you—eh? Pshaw!"

"Well, I'm sure, G.—"

"Yes; and so am I. And then you're bottled up between two fogies—yes, I repeat the expression—fogies, whom you don't care about; and you can't get beer; and they keep the potatoes on the sideboard; and when you're taking wine with anybody, you say, 'Shall it be sherry?' because you see the champagne running low. Yar! it's all mummery!"

"But it must be different at home, G."

"Of course; because then a man may sit down quietly to a steak two hours before the company come, if there's room enough at the fire to cook it. At least that's what I mean to do."

"Oh, you mean to have a dinner party, then?" said Mrs. Gudge, delighted to hear the last speech of her husband, for it was to the point she was aiming at. "Well, I'm glad of it—in fact I don't see how we could do otherwise; and now we've got that boy—who will wait capitally if we can hire Sims—I think, however troublesome it may be, that it will be looked for."

Mr. Gudge was in a measure trapped. He hated all conventional society, literally; but still he was ambitious of gaining a great end, and he knew that a few offerings must be made to the idol custom to secure his purpose. But after his tirade against dinner parties generally, it would not do to yield too suddenly, so he said—

"Have you weighed the question? Do you think you can go through the dismal business with all the women upstairs after you leave the table—eh?"

"I believe I have been educated, G.," replied Mrs. Gudge, with asperity, feeling that reflections were made on her social attainments. "I can read, I think; and write. I don't know where the bills would be if I couldn't, or your income. Don't fear for the ladies upstairs: if you can amuse the gentlemen below, the great load will be taken from my mind."

Mrs. Gudge spoke all this, as women write notes—with many italicised

words, in which style of emphasis, when irritated, they think their great strength consists. And having delivered herself of so much irony, she walked to the window, and looked out very hard at nothing, in a great state of excitement.

"Who did you want to ask?" asked Mr. Gudge, surlily; after waiting a little time for her to speak first, and finding she didn't.

"Who!" replied Mrs. Gudge, waiting a little time longer, that she might not appear to clutch too readily at the chance. "Who? Why, the Flacks, and Mr. Snash and his wife, and the Baron of course; and the Flack's governess who can talk French to him, and look destangy, and why not your particular friend, Sir Frederick Arden and his wife."

"Pooh! stuff!" said Mr. Gudge. "We couldn't ask them."

"Oh!" rejoined his lady; "I thought you were so intimate. Dear me! such very close friends."

She knew almost as well as her husband how far the intimacy went, although she was not so conversant with the cause. But the remark was calculated to make him uncomfortable: it was a true woman's stratagem. And hollow as it was, in a measure it succeeded, for Mr. Gudge ever prided himself upon his connections; and as the idea flitted through his mind, what a great thing it would be if he could shew the Flacks and Snashes, and anybody else who might come, that he could entertain a real, living, legitimate baronet at his table, his countenance relaxed in severity until, as well as he could do it, without compromising himself, he fell into Mrs. Gudge's views.

In order that his crooked acquiescence might be clenched on the other side of his obstinacy, Mrs. Gudge struck the last blow, by immediately sending out for some engraved invitation paper, which Mr. Gudge could fill up. Resolved to do everything handsomely, she purchased from the most dashing Bromptonian librarian various sheets of note size, with flourishing copper-plate "requests the &cs." as well as embossed borders and gilt edges. Others had paper lace round them, of the popular top-of-a-French-plum-box design; and one had a coloured representation, on its first page, of a number of ladies and gentlemen of the middle ages sitting down to a banquet in red tights—that is to say, the gentlemen—and Plantagenet tunics: above whom the word "diner" was shining in gold letters; of which Mrs. Gudge observed, "it was such a pity to have left out the other N."

All their friends accepted the invitation readily, except Sir Frederick; so Mr. Gudge went down to Richmond to see him, determined not to allow him the chance of refusing: and in the interview drove him into such a corner of cross-examination as to his engagements, that the baronet was obliged to say that he would come. And as soon as all this was settled, Mrs. Gudge never went to sleep for a week, but had waking night-mares of made dishes and borrowed forks, which distressed her husband quite as much as herself. For when dreaming of great properties confided to his care, that might be made, with the least secure chicanery in the world to fall into his hands, he would be startled by the voice of his partner, wondering if their fish-kettle was large enough,

or asking how few of champagne they had better order from the nearest Wine and Spirit Establishment. And then she would entertain him with going over bills of fare, with their removes, for different months, studied from cookery books and housekeeper's diaries. And finally, she would go over the items from the shop list of a purveyor of rout accessories generally, who let out bottles, glasses, druggets, seats, lamps, and linen—in fact, doubts arose as to whether he would not have found guests upon an emergency—until she got into such a whirl of calculations that she happily went to sleep; as restless folks at last slumber by counting several hundreds of visionary sheep into their pens.

The preparations for the Gudge banquet commenced several days before the time appointed; and then all repose for Sarah and Christopher was at an end. For the first was encountered in all parts of Brompton, running about with a key on her finger, and holding down her head that her cap might be blown as far back on it as possible; and the second toiled perpetually with the Olive's carriage filled with glass, crockery, meat, and vegetables, to and from all sorts of emporiums. The Olive himself was for the first time in his life neglected; so he usually cried himself tired, and then got sleepy, in which state he was sent to bed in rooms artificially darkened, generally rousing himself again, very wide awake and convivial, as Sarah came to rest; and effectually destroying all her intentions of sleep for the night. On the eve of the event all Mrs. Gudge's finery came out again—the cherry satin, and the wreath of red poppies, ivy leaves, and gold hops. So did Mr. Gudge's rich blue stock; as well as his short glazed boots, to which Christopher, being told to clean them, had in an evil moment of ignorance used common blacking, which somewhat deteriorated their appearance. By a strange fatality, on the very same day, Sarah black-leaded the bronze stove in the drawing-room, and after a great deal of labour,—in the course of which according to the manners of her race, much of the metallic polish was transferred to her own person—she confessed her inability to hide the rust. The explosion of anger on the part of her master and mistress was terrible at these blunders; but they ought to have taken into consideration that neither boots nor bronze fireplace had been called into use for a long period. Therefore Mr. Gudge was compelled to draw on his short dress Bluchers as they were; and the stove was concealed by a marvellous arrangement of nipped silver paper which looked like a dishevelled fly-settle.

The day came. Mr. Gudge did not go to his chambers, but might have been seen all day, drawing corks in his shirt sleeves, had any one called—which nobody did, except one, as will presently be seen. And Mrs. Gudge, with her sleeves turned up above her elbows—to effect which she was obliged to snip the wristbands—was garnishing dishes, setting up candles, and watching the pots—until there was a chance of their never boiling at all—without intermission. An experienced char-woman had been retained for the day, to wash dishes in the background, and revive the spoons and forks upon the sly between the courses; having received particular directions from Mrs. Gudge to dip them into pump water afterwards that they might not feel warm when placed before the visitors.

"And Sims," said the lady of the house, to the ingenious person who came to wait, finding his own waistcoat and white cotton gloves: "Sims—if anybody asks you for champagne, and there is no more in the bottle, pretend not to hear them, but directly carry the potatoes, or whatever else is handy, to somebody who don't appear to have any."

"Oh yes, mum," said Sims, who was a meek man and always looked as if he was waiting—not as a tavern waiter, but rather as a crushed and dispirited butler. "I know how to manage that, mum. I've often been told so before."

"And recollect my servants expect their rights: so don't push forward and open the door yourself when the company go, for the shillings."

"No, mum," said Sims, but not in the decided tone of his former answer.

"And pay particular attention to Sir Frederick Arden—you will hear his name when he arrives—don't let him want for anything, especially cruets, and remember when he comes to announce him very loud: and mind! he's a Bart."

"Yes, mum."

"And, Sims—can you carve?" asked Mrs. Gudge somewhat confidentially.

"Anything straightforrard, mum; such as cold round of beef or Cautyberry brawns."

"But poultry?"

"Can't say I know a great deal about poultries, mum."

"That's okkard!" observed Mrs. Gudge. And then conscious of the slip, she repeated, with emphasis: "very *awkward*. It's only the wings that worrit me. I always make a mistake, and take off half the breast, or nothing but the bones."

"How could he carve for you?" chimed in Mr. Gudge, who was unpacking some wine glasses and putting them in a row upon the sideboard, which was one of those very-new-looking mahogany affairs you see in taverns just started, and parlours of moderately-married young couples. "What nonsense your talking. Sims! go and get a duster."

As the attendant departed, Mrs. Gudge exclaimed with some emphasis:—

"Well, G.; I *think* it would have been more to your credit as a man and a husband, not to have let me down before that green-grocer."

"Pooh!" was Mr. Gudge's brief rejoinder; "pooh! you know nothing about it. Hey day! who's here now?"

The noise of wheels was heard in the road, and the sound ceased in front of Coke Villa; as Mrs. Gudge ran to the window to see what it was. But before she had time to dart back again a lady, who was setting in a carriage of that tumbled-to-decay appearance which characterizes those let at sea-side places, caught sight of her, and made a bow.

"Oh G.!" said Mrs. Gudge, apparently forgetting her late anger in

her affliction; "if here isn't that Mrs. Hamper, whom we've never seen since you made me bring her home."

"Well—say we're not at home," said Gudge.

"But she's seen me; it's no use. What must we do? And there isn't a room to ask her into."

Mrs. Hamper however did not seem to understand this; for by this time she had got out of the chaise, and was in the passage.

"I must be rude to her, if she stays long," said Mrs. Gudge.

"She can't stay in the passage, anyhow," replied Mr. Gudge. "Go and see what she wants. But be civil."

And as Mrs. Gudge was not often in the habit of disobeying his orders, she went down into the parlour, in which the dinner table was being laid out; and told Christopher to shew the lady in; which he did with a check apron on belonging to Sarah, a spoon in his hand, and his face covered with plate powder,

"How are you, Mrs. Gudge?" said Mrs. Hamper, as she entered. "I've never called to thank you for your hospitality; indeed, I owe you so much."

"Not much, Mrs. —," hesitated Mrs. Gudge, who had a knack of constantly forgetting people's names when she ought to have remembered them. "Not so very much; it was seven and sixpence, I think."

As she reverted to the old card debt, the bright notion struck her that Mrs. Hamper had called to settle it. How agreeably unexpected: it would pay for the fish! But Mrs. Hamper had not the least intention of doing anything of the kind.

"Yes; seven and sixpence," replied that lady, as she added, immediately, glancing at the table, "you have a dinner-party, I see. To let you know the truth, I heard so from the pastry-cook, where I stopped for some rusks. For I will tell you a little plan of mine. Fanny is on a visit, and it is scarcely worth while to have a dinner cooked; so I get some rusks, and go to my cheesemonger, who is a civil creature as ever lived, and taste his cheeses. It makes a nice little meal; and then I have a ride in the park, and come home to an early tea. And what time do you dine?"

"At seven, mam," replied Mrs. Gudge, somewhat more distantly, as the memory of the debt appeared to vanish away altogether.

"Dear me—my usual hour," observed Mrs. Hamper; "and how many do you expect?"

"We are ten altogether," replied Mrs. Gudge.

"Ten—ah! a charming number," said Mrs. Hamper. "I am sure I should have been so happy to have come, if I had known about it. I dare say, though, now, my dear madam, I should interfere with your arrangements."

"Why, really," answered Mrs. Gudge, "our table is not very large; or I'm sure—that is—"

And here she broke down altogether, not knowing what it was. But Mrs. Hamper quickly came to the rescue.

"Oh! I don't care about actually being at the table: not in the

least : in fact, in any little room you had—just as the dishes came off. I could be very comfortable.”

The other lady scarcely knew what to do ; but aware that her husband was desirous of paying some attention to Mrs. Hamper, and recollecting also that she was an acquaintance of the Ardens, she gasped out something about being happy to see her, and then begged her visitor would excuse her on the score of what she had to arrange. Whereupon Mrs. Hamper departed, and Mrs. Gudge returned to her husband to tell him what had happened.

There were a few intervening hours of confusion and scolding, and at last, Mr. and Mrs. Gudge contrived to get dressed, and were ready to receive their guests. The Snashes came first, running in from their adjacent dwelling, and followed by their servant, with Mrs. Snash's cap of state in a hat-box. Then there was a long pause ; and then came the Baron, who was a foreign gentleman with mustachios, and who sang songs to a guitar at Brompton parties ; and had been looking out for a wife with property, who wanted a title in return, until his chances were getting somewhat desperate. On public occasions he wore a small piece of twopenny crimson ribbon in the button-hole of his coat, which was considered a mark of great distinction ; and he was generally introduced in a loud tone ; and the person presented to him was informed afterwards that he was ‘a very remarkable man, Sir, that ; and has moved in the highest circles.’ But he was not proud ; he would dine anywhere.

Five minutes after seven, the Flack's carriage came up to the door. It was a double-bodied, single-horsed, four-wheeled affair, with a head behind, under which were stowed Mrs. and Miss Flack, and, quite up in the corner, Miss Preston, who was the governess ; and Mr. Flack sat on the front seat, in a white neckcloth and gloves, looking exceedingly uncomfortable at being out in full dress at daylight.

Conversation went on tolerably well amongst the previous arrivals until the Flacks came : for the Baron knew the Snashes, and was always a patient listener to the hopes and fears of the Stamps and Taxes, upon which the Snashes were wont to live. But the Flacks were awful people. Mr. Flack had been through the “Gazette” an innumerable number of times, and always rose up more dashing than ever after the occurrence ; and migrated a step westward each time : from Bedford Row to Russell Square—from Russell Square to Baker Street—from Baker Street to Cadogan Place, until any other more accidental transit of his vaunting ambition would have o'erleaped itself, and tumbled into Chelsea.

Mrs. Flack had learned the “Court Guide” by heart, and talked of great people. Miss Flack never laughed because she thought it vulgar ; and Miss Preston, the governess of the Flack juniors, was a very pretty, sensible girl, with a beautiful voice, but, as the mother and daughter sometimes agreed, required a great deal of tact to manage. For, although they liked her singing to be shewn off, in society, as that of a person maintained in their establishment, they were very jealous of the praises lavished upon her afterwards by such disinterested

members of the company as chose to admire a governess for her mere beauty and talents. However, they knew there was no piano at Coke Villa, and so they brought her with them, because Mr. Gudge had wished it—having helped Mr. Flack to pass easily through Portugal Street, and because they thought it swelled their train, as Eastern great people dragged slaves about after them.

There was a long dreary time of waiting, and at last Sir Frederick Arden arrived, about half an hour after the appointed hour. Mrs. Gudge, who as she had confessed to her husband in confidence, "had been all of a twitter since the haunch went down," had long since retired from taking any share in the conversation; but sat, in a corner, looking sulkily dignified, and beginning to wish that she had never given the party. Mr. Gudge walked about, and rubbed his hands, and tried to talk to everybody as he looked at his watch; and at times, finding the heavy sensation of the before-dinner conversation overpowering, ran out of the room altogether and waited, doing nothing, on the staircase; until the announcement of Sims, of "Sir Frederick Harding," with an afterthought of "Bart.!" roused him to exertion. He shook hands with Sir Frederick before the Flacks—Mrs. Gudge thought *that* something—and apologized for the absence of Lady Arden who was suffering from a severe attack of spasms. And then Mrs. Gudge gave various whispered orders to Christopher, and sundry pantomimical nods, and frowns, and odd expressions to Sims, until she was told that dinner was on table, of which she appeared not to be aware. Here there was some little confusion, for nobody had told anybody else what to do; but at last the people shuffled about, and offered arms timidly, and contrived to squeeze down the narrow staircase in some sort of couples, until they were finally arranged as follows, which *coup d'œil* will save explanation:—

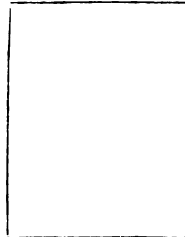
Mrs. Gudge.

Sir F. Arden.

Miss Flack.

Mr. Snash.

Mrs. Flack.



The Baron.

Miss Preston.

Mr. Flack.

Mrs. Snash.

Mr. Gudge.

The dinner passed off, as most parties of the kind usually do—in **level** dullness on the part of the guests, and the extreme of anxiety as **regarded** the host and hostess. In vain the wine was poured out, and in **vain** the people were told by Mrs. Gudge that they did not eat anything. Sir Frederick was extremely polite to everybody, but nothing

beyond it. Gudge had watched him, with hyena eyes, when he first saw Christopher waiting; but the schooled tranquil expression of the man habituated to society, had been, in this instance, beyond the attorney's perception, and he was annoyed at finding the effect he had intended to make quite quashed. In the pause between the first and second courses, a loud ring announced the arrival of Mrs. Hamper, whom Mrs. Gudge heard ushered into the back parlour all amongst the dessert and coffee cups: and after the next remove even the Baron's stories of what he had done for Poland, and the parish failed to excite any sympathy. Mr. Flack had been placed next his governess, and of course could not be expected to pay her any attention; and on his other side was Mrs. Snash, who said "Sir" when she addressed him, and was evidently, to his thinking, a woman of no connexions. Very often there was a dead silence of several minutes, when Miss Flack would look at her mother, behind Mr. Snash and turn up her eyes; and then nobody was able, or cared, to fill up the void, except Mrs. Gudge, who once said "Awful pause!" But finding that if possible it made it more dreary she did not try again. So that altogether it was, if anything, a relief when Mrs. Hamper made her entrance with the fruit; but to the astonishment of the host and hostess brought in a young man with her, some five or six and twenty years of age, of prepossessing appearance, who seemed somewhat distressed at his introduction.

"Mrs. Gudge," said Mrs. Hamper, "let me present my nephew to you—Mr. Ellis; he came up by mere chance from Oxford to-day, so I brought him with me."

If the same shock had been applied to Sir Frederick Arden and Mr. Gudge, their start could not have been more simultaneous, as they looked up at the new comer. And immediately afterwards their eyes met. Gudge's were twinkling with an expression of cunning and excitement that was perfectly frightful; and Sir Frederick's were wide open, whilst his features had turned in an instant as pale as the cloth.

The cause of this emotion, however, appeared quiet enough. He took a seat by Mrs. Gudge, whilst Mrs. Hamper was accommodated with a chair, by the host. She did not appear to have changed her toilet since the morning; but had seemingly done nothing more than take her bonnet off. She bowed to Sir Frederick; hoped Lady Arden was well; looked pleasantly at every body; and told Mr. Gudge she took port. The attorney was delighted to begin to pass the decanters as he relied upon the wine to dispel some of the weight.

But it was worse than ever; and the feeling was not lessened when the Baronet rose from the table, and begged Mr. Gudge would speak with him, for two minutes, in another room.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DINNER PARTY DOES NOT IMPROVE.

THE room into which Mr. Gudge accompanied Sir Frederick Arden ~~was~~ not very comfortable. It was the back parlour; and moreover it was the back parlour on the day of a dinner-party.

It had taken to itself somewhat the air of an expanded closet into which all sorts of things had been thrust to be out of the way, or in readiness. All the chairs had been transported to other regions, and so the floor was made into one large table and covered with half-demolished viands; and an inoffensive cheffonier was nearly weighed down by a flock of coffee cups, separated into detachments by candlesticks which rose here and there in the glory of clean wax, recent leathering, and tinted ornaments, like the banners in the Lord Mayor's show amidst the procession. A secretary had also been cleared out; and in its compartments were now seen wingless corpses of fowls, and solitary patties that had once rejoiced in company. In front, too, was a battalion of hired tumblers, still keeping, on the bottom, strange hieroglyphics in ink denoting their mercantile value, which had, unfortunately, on the dinner table, come out in bold relief with the table-cloth as a background.

As they entered the room, Sims, who was eating something in a corner, hastily put down the plate, and tried to hide it in a drawer, as he muttered:

"Beg pardon, Sir!—duck, Sir, you see, Sir; pity to waste, I thought, Sir."

"Just go down stairs, now," replied Mr. Gudge.

"Down stairs, Sir; yes, Sir," said Sims. "But you see this duck, Sir, had brandy-sauce poured over it by mistake and was sent away."

"Eh?" sharply asked Mr. Gudge.

"Yes, Sir," answered Sims. "But duck's werry good, Sir, and so's brandy-sauce, Sir, and so I thought I'd eat them myself, with your permission, because, Sir, I always does my duty by my employers and hopes no offence as the saying is, for I've known you a long time, Mr. Gudge, and wish to speak a word to you, Sir, werry per-tickler."

It was evident from his staring eye and confidential manner, that the brandy sauce had been very powerful.

"Get down stairs," answered Mr. Gudge.

"No, Sir,—excuse me, Sir—not down stairs," returned Sims; "my place is here to mind your noble company. God bless you, Mr. Gudge, and you, Sir Frederick Bart, and all your friends."

"Do you hear what I say?" cried Mr. Gudge, sharper than ever. "Get out of the room, you're drunk!"

And taking advantage of Sims's proximity to the door, he pushed him out of the room as he closed it after him, continuing, with sudden gravity :

"Now, Sir Frederick, you will excuse this litter I hope, and also a seat ; but it's our only place unoccupied."

"No, Mr. Gudge, Sir, not drunk," exclaimed the voice of Sims, as the door opened, and the head of that individual re-appeared. "You'll excuse me, Sir, though I'm a poor man with a small family ; but I know my duty, and have been trusted with noble lords and ladies and the highest of carriage company. No, Mr. Gudge, Sir ; never did I expect this from you !"

And Sims' failing voice betokened that he was about to weep, when Gudge thrust him violently back again, shut the door once more, and turned the bolt.

"You must excuse this," he said, grinning, to Sir Frederick with a face about as cheerful as an antique comic mask. "You see, Sir F., we're not all born with soup-ladles in our mouths ; some are obliged to be content with bone marrow-spoons. But sit down. Stop, I forgot though ; there's nothing to sit upon. Never mind ; we're old friends, and you're not proud you know, eh ?"

And here Mr. Gudge thrust one hand into his pocket to play at pitch and toss with himself, with some half crowns, and jumped his large watch seals in the other, and rocked himself upon his toes and heels, as though he had been trying the strength of his straps and braces, in elongating his body and stretching the various pipes of his circulation to their utmost.

"How singularly unfortunate !" exclaimed the Baronet, heedless of Gudge's vulgar familiarity. "To think of meeting him above all other persons in the world !"

"Uncommon coincidence, certainly," replied the attorney. "Made it quite a family party altogether ; didn't it—eh, Sir F. ? Ha ! ha !"

"There cannot be the least suspicion of anything ?" asked Sir Frederick. "Do you suppose that young Ellis is at all aware of any of the circumstances connected with the affair ?"

"Not a bit—not a bit," answered Gudge. "He must have been quite a boy : and all the papers are safe enough. Every drop of ink ever shed in the matter is turning brown in my safe ; and likely to keep there."

"Don't you think it would be better to destroy them altogether ?"

"No—I don't think I should like to destroy them, Sir F." replied the attorney, with some meaning. "Because, you know, there is no telling in this world what may happen ; and some day they might be very valuable. Fortunes have hung, and been made, and lost, and changed hands on less than a single line of those deeds."

"What do you mean ?" asked the Baronet quickly as he fixed his eye on his wily host.



Christopher's combat with the Green-grocer.

London Richard Bentley, 1847

"Mean—me? nothing," replied Gudge. "What should I, more than I've said? Only I suppose you'd like your young one to be a Baronet some day. You must be dead first though, you know, eh? he! he! he! I forgot that."

"Do you mean to say there would be a chance of his not becoming one?"

"Oh—I say nothing; but the smoothest way's the pleasantest. And really you know, Sir F., such strange things do happen! By the way, our young ones ought to be acquainted. My Joey's younger than your Freddy, by five years, but he's uncommonly 'cute. We must bring them together."

"My little boy's health is exceedingly delicate: he scarcely ever goes out."

"Ah!" said Gudge, thrusting his hands so much deeper into his pockets that he appeared to be feeling after the tops of his boots. "Ah! I often think we've got the pull of you nobs, in pluck, eh? Lady Arden, too, couldn't come to-day—spasms—yes; very bad things—I know."

And Mr. Gudge who had evidently allowed the subject to rankle all dinner time—from the ironical acerbity with which he spoke—here winked at Sir Frederick, and taking his left hand from his pocket pointed to something unseen, over his shoulder.

"I can assure you Lady Arden was suffering severely when I came away," said Sir Frederick. "But we should return to the table. You can excuse this desertion upon the score of urgent business. One word only: you are convinced that nothing is suspected."

"Safe as the bank, I tell you," answered Gudge. "And if it wasn't; how could there be? Next to you I am the principal party interested; and I don't think it would answer my purpose very well to blow upon the matter—would it? eh?"

He turned towards the door, and opened it for the other to pass out, when the progress of both was for a moment stopped by a sudden scuffle in the passage, in which the light showed Sims and Christopher to be engaged.

"There!" cried Christopher, who was clinging to Sims's coat, and was evidently very much excited, "and there! and there's another winner. You're not going to bully me, I know."

"Why you owdacious impudence!" replied the man-in-waiting as he caught hold of the boy's hair and twisted it tight with his hand, "What do you mean?—eh? Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"No—not a bit," returned Christopher again vigorously assailing the legs of the greengrocer; "you're not coming here to steal, I can tell you."

"Hey-day! hey-day! now then!" cried Mr. Gudge, dragging the boy away from the other. "What are you about? I ask you again, what does all this mean?"

"Mr. Gudge, Sir," replied Sims hazily, becoming very suddenly

tranquil as he rubbed his shins. "I've known you and your good lady a long time and wouldn't wrong you of a bone—no, that I wouldn't, not for sums unborn—but my perkisits have always been allowed."

"What the devil do you mean, Sir?" loudly asked the attorney.

"He's got his umbrella all full of things, Sir," cried Christopher in great excitement; "and I told him they were yours and he'd no right to them and shouldn't have them—should he, Sir?"

And here Mr. Gudge perceived that an umbrella of a peculiarly drop-sical look had fallen down behind Sims in the struggle. Catching it up, he opened it quickly, and set free a quantity of fowls' legs, figs, and patties, ingeniously stored within it, which showered down over him.

"Why you're a thief, Sir—a swindler—a midnight burglar!" exclaimed Gudge, "a drunken smuggler, Sir. Pick all this up, and take every bone into the kitchen again, or I'll send for the police."

"You'll excuse me, Mr. Gudge, Sir," continued the persevering Sims; "but though I'm a poor man, my family is quite the gentleman and was overseer, and those things are all right in the highest of nob's houses, and no questions asked nor followers allowed."

"You're a tipsy imposter!" cried, or rather roared Mr. Gudge; "be off this instant; don't let me see you again. Get away, I tell you."

And he gave the wretched Sims a thrust, that nearly knocked him over Christopher, who was collecting some of the fragments, and sent him to the top of the kitchen stairs, down which he rapidly disappeared followed by his umbrella, which came flying after him like an evil bird.

"You'll excuse this, Sir F.," said Mr. Gudge recovering his breath, "but these things will happen you know. Christopher—you're a good boy—an excellent boy, Christopher. There—you may eat those side-bones: never mind saving them. He's got more spirit than I thought he had," he continued to the Baronet; "but that's not to be wondered at; he! he! eh? Come, Sir F.; let's join our friends again."

And here Mr. Gudge with hideous familiarity slapped Sir Frederick Arden on the back, as he opened the door of the dining-room, keeping his hand on the Baronet's shoulder long enough for the others to see the familiarity, until they once more took their seats at the table.

The conviviality had not increased in their absence. On the contrary, the interview of Gudge and Sir Frederick, and the indistinct sounds of the late *fracas*—which Mrs. Gudge at first imagined to be a row between her husband and his guest—somewhat lessened it, dismal as it had before been. So the lady of the house having looked round at all the others, until she had collected their eyes into one focus, rose in a stately manner and headed them from the room—the two last, who were Miss Preston and Miss Flack putting their arms about one another's waists. Not that they were particularly attached to one another, but the performance is one frequently indulged in by ladies in similar cases;

being intended, as it is supposed, to exhibit a pretty confiding simplicity in the eyes of the gentlemen, and make them envious. For the same reason the designing creatures kiss babies so frequently in your presence ; but this by the way.

The dinner we have said was dull—dull as a standard comedy, or a November twilight; or an amateur work, or a popular lecture—dull as only a conventional dinner can be, in other circles besides Mr. Gudge's. For you must have recollected many parties to which you have been asked, whose very ghastliness almost made them amusing ; where several dreary people had been cruelly collected together to get nothing comfortably : and to all appearances, for no earthly purpose but to be shown silver spoons and new-patterned champagne glasses, and forced into the necessity of repeating the same absurd ceremonies in their turn. We never yet considered it a compliment to be asked to a dinner, where display was palpably the main cause of giving it ; and the whole attention had been directed to collecting showy things on the table, which money could procure anywhere, rather than agreeable persons round it. Whenever you hear individuals spoken of as "great dinner people," you may be certain they can shine in no other way but with the borrowed lustre of their cpergnes and hash-dishes. If pleasant feelings and social enjoyments cannot be got off common crockery and plain joints, they will never come from heavy plate and chilled made dishes. On the contrary, these have a tendency to weigh down the lightest spirits.

The gentlemen were not more lively when the ladies had left than before. Mr. Snash amused himself with pitching into the government generally ; attributing, however, all the crimes and evils of the State to the Stamps and Taxes. The Baron wished to unfold to Sir Frederick a scheme he had for emancipating Poland by a company with a capital of a hundred millions to be raised in shares, and, if Sir Frederick's name was down amongst the directors, would ensure its success, and enormous profits—"in salt, Sir ; in the simple domestic article of salt alone," as he energetically informed him, as he went off into a series of complicated saline statistics that would have driven Cocker himself into Bedlam to have followed ; to all of which Sir Frederick bowed, but, for the world, could not have told the next minute what he had been listening to. Mr. Gudge and Mr. Flack got up a little dismal conversation about bills ; and Mr. Ellis, who had been introduced by Mrs. Hamper, not knowing anybody, sat by himself and appeared to wish that he was anywhere else.

At length Christopher announced that tea was ready ; upon which Mr. Gudge did not wait, according to custom, until the information had been repeated, but asked everybody, at once, if they would have any more wine. And as the manner in which the question was put ensured an answer in the negative, he proposed that they should join the ladies ; which everybody appeared quite ready to do except Sir Frederick Arden ; and he slipped off quietly, whilst Mr. Gudge waited behind in the room to put what wine remained in the glasses back into the decanters, and lock them up.

There was an hour's yawning in the drawing-room, not improved by the inability of Mrs. Gudge to get up a rubber for Mrs. Hamper; for every body had been so dull that they did not want any pretext to stay. So they sat and talked in an under tone, and yawned round, until Mrs. Hamper begged her young cavalier would go and fetch her a cab, and told him, if he could, to get one that was waiting at the door of a public-house, because they went cheaper than the others. As soon as he had left the room, she would begin, in spite of all Mr. Gudge's evident wishes to stop her, to talk about her nephew; how he was an only son, and would have an immense fortune, and how, his was the family in which the unfortunate affair happened some years back, of the eldest girl running away from school, and never being heard of again. All this occupied a little time, until the cab was brought; and then Mrs. Hamper begged to speak a word with Mrs. Gudge.

"My dear Madam," she said to her on the landing, "you will excuse me I know; but that tongue that went from table—it was scarcely cut. I shall be happy to buy it of you, to take home."

"I think there is still a little account between us," said Mrs. Gudge: "seven and sixpence if I don't mistake—"

"I remember perfectly," continued Mrs. Hamper; "and was about to say, if you will take half-a-crown for the tongue, that will make ten shillings."

The sum was clearer to Mrs. Gudge than the chance of payment. So she thought she would be at once magnanimous, and begged Mrs. Hamper would accept of it, which she did incontinently, and took a few biscuits as well, to taste the cheeses with when she went marketing.

And now the guests speedily left, as Mrs. Gudge outwardly lamented their early departure, but inwardly rejoiced as the door closed upon the last. Sims sneaked away, unknown to anybody, and was supposed to have taken a bottle of sherry with him that could not be accounted for; and then Sarah prepared with Christopher to sit up all night, and get things a little straight by the morning.

"Come into the back parlour, G.; come in, if my health's an object," said Mrs. Gudge, as she heard the welcome sound of the chain being put up at the door; "and get something to eat, for not a bit has passed my lips this blessed day."

"Well, you would have the party," half growled Gudge.

"Would have it—yes, G., and I have done my duty; and we have shewn the Flacks and Snashes our true position, G. I should like to see them get a baronet to meet their friends—that's all."

And unlocking the cheffonier, to which various fragments had been consigned, Mrs. Gudge sat down to supper, quite reconciled to her uncomfortable evening, now it was over, in the idea of having shewn Sir Frederick Arden to the Flacks and Snashes.

CHAPTER XXII.

SIR FREDERICK MAKES A RESOLVE.

"Now then, spooney ; where are you a drivin' on?"

It was the day of the Horticultural Fête at Chiswick ; and London appeared to have poured out every one of its equipages upon the Turnham Green road. One after another came the dashing vehicles, filled with handsome women, the gay colours of whose toilets formed a more attractive parterre than any they were going to see. The parks and west-end squares were empty : all along the way, tributary roads assisted to increase the press ; omnibuses filled with young gentlemen, with fast notions but small incomes, who dared not meet the gaze of evening party-giving friends upon the roof, stopped at sly corners to put down their half-stewed passengers before they got to the green : and hack-cabs were detected lurking in secluded outskirts of the gardens, having arrived there by retired byways from the same feelings of false delicacy on the part of their hirers.

There were innumerable excitements on the road, as every body carried out the grand principle of life even in the vehicles, and endeavoured to get before everybody else ; but the greatest squabble took place at Hammersmith, where a four-wheeled chaise, pulled by a large awkward horse had drawn up so suddenly, that had it not been for what appeared to be the top of a packing-case, tied to the back of the hinder seat, the pole of the barouche that followed it would have inflicted some dreadful injury. As it was, the shock nearly sent the lady and gentleman in front on to the splash-board ; and provoked the remark from the aggressor, according to custom :

"Now then, spooney ; where are you a drivin' on?"

The page on the back seat whose lot it had been during the journey to make intimate acquaintance with the heads of all the horses and the poles of all the carriages in the line directly behind him, contrived to get down ; and with the assistance of the driver, pulled the chaise out of the rank, to the gate of a small brick house placarded "To Let," with some very green railings before it, enclosing a small plot of metropolitan grass, which, from its unsatisfactory state of verdure might have been supposed always to have grown under the drip of a tree ; only there was nothing higher than a few stumps, looking as though they were intended to perch stuffed birds upon. On this plot was a rustic seat ; and it need scarcely be said, that it was of stout build, when we add, that on this seat stood Mrs. Hamper, who had taken that position when the first carriages came down the road—having arrived herself in an early omnibus—and was violently telegraphing everybody she saw, with whom she was acquainted, in the hopes of finding a seat on to Chiswick. But the dust must have blinded everybody, for nobody

acknowledged her signal, until the four-wheeled party in question arrived; when the chaise was directly pulled across the road, raising the anger of the succeeding charioteer, and, as we have seen, stopped at the gate.

"How very kind of you, Mr. and Mrs. Gudge," said Mrs. Hamper, as she came down to the railings. "I thought I saw your charming and comfortable carriage; there are so few like it. I won't detain you a minute. But will you not take anything?"

Mr. Gudge, for it was that gentleman, had anticipated that Mrs. Hamper would invite herself, so he was not astonished; and, as he meant that any attention should, someday or another, answer his purpose, he was not angry. And at the same time, Mrs. Gudge, knowing how oddly Mrs. Hamper was acquainted with all sorts of great people, was rather pleased at having her with them, than otherwise.

"You're very good," said the attorney, in reply to what he conceived was a proffer of hospitality. "The dust has got into my throat rather. I don't mind a glass of your table beer to wash it down."

"Dear me—yes—that is what I meant," said Mrs. Hamper; "because as this is not my own house, you see, but belongs to my landlord in London, I cannot offer you anything as I should like to do. In fact there is nothing in it except my bonnet just at this present minute. But I was going to say that—"

"Oh never mind—pray never mind," said Gudge.

"Oh—but I *do* mind," replied Mrs. Hamper. "I was going to say, that there's a good man at the corner of the road with that little waggon, whose ginger-beer is excellent. And by no means expensive," she added in a lower tone; "in fact he is a person to be depended on. I know him very well."

A wave of Mrs. Hamper's handkerchief brought the vendor, with his cart, to the railings, as the lady went back to the house, to get her bonnet, and be out of the way of paying for anything ordered.

"What, Skittler! are you here?" asked Mr. Gudge, as he recognized the man.

"Yes, Sir; here we is," returned the other; "and wish we wasn't."

"How so? business dull? eh?" further inquired Mr. Gudge.

"Not over bright. There's a fountain has followed us all down the road, with lemonade; and the people like that better than bottles. It frightens 'em more, you see; because it might burst."

"Is that really the case, young man?" asked Mrs. Gudge.

"Fact, mum, returned Skittler. "Nobody wouldn't drink ginger beer unless it made 'em nervous; they wouldn't touch this if I didn't send the corks right over the road; and yet there isn't a better article at the price in London: for, as I says, what can you give much more than wind and water for a penny. Now, just try it, Sir—or perhaps the good lady—"

"I think not to-day, thankee," said Mr. Gudge. "Here is our

passenger coming. Christopher, jump down. If there is not room, you must stand on the step."

Skittler ran to open the gate, as Mrs. Hamper approached, and assisted her into the chaise, touching his hat, as he observed :

"'Twon't rain to-day, mum. Hope you'll enjoy yourself. You'll find me here when you come back. The lady knows me," he continued to Mr. Gudge; "and the Taglony waggon too, mum, don't you? Yes, mum. All right, Sir; hit him again. Now then," and here he addressed a foot-passenger; "here you are, Sir—the regular high-pressure, no-safety-valve knock-me-down nectar as patronized by the royal family; and only a penny a glass! only a penny! Why you've got that—surely!"

When Skittler failed to persuade the appetite of Lis customers, he insulted their poverty, which plan generally answered. People will do a great deal for which there is no necessity, not to be thought poor. The feeling, being tolerably general, gives rise to nearly every species of social tomfoolery.

Mrs. Hamper gradually settled down in the hind seat of the chaise, whilst Christopher hung on to the step, provoking the cry of "Whip behind!" from every boy that passed; and at last the party got to the gates of the gardens.

"Dear me! where can it be?" said Mrs. Hamper, who had been feeling in all her pockets, turning her reticule inside out, and looking at the bottom of the chaise for the last two minutes. "I cannot surely have left it at home!"

"What have you lost, mam? Your handkercher?" asked Mrs. Gudge.

"No—my ticket," said Mrs. Hamper. "It's gone—clearly. How very unfortunate. I am afraid I must trouble you to pay for me; for really when one comes from home, one has so much to think about, that I generally forget my purse. Have you such a thing as five shillings about you?"

Mrs. Gudge made no reply; so Mr. Gudge was compelled to produce the money. This was not all, however. To those not having tickets the price at the gate was doubled; so that Mr. Gudge was obliged to pay up again; and consequently entered the grounds, with his wife on one arm and Mrs. Hamper on the other, completely hidden between the two, in no very good humour.

The turf was almost obliterated by the gay company swarming over it; and Mrs. Hamper was kissing her hand to every body, right and left, to the great gratification of Mrs. Gudge, who walked on in all the pride of knowing somebody who knew some aristocracy; and sometimes returned bows never intended for her. At length, after being wedged through a crowded tent to look at some flowers they knew nothing about, and cared less, they came out upon the company assembled round the band; and the first group they saw was the party with Sir Frederick Arden; including the Mainwarings, and one or two officers, as well as Lady Arden, who at first did not know the extent of her mis-

fortune; for she only saw Mrs. Hamper, who, in herself, was bad enough at any time. For Mrs. Gudge's new blazing parasol, which was almost like an umbrella connected with the Arabian Nights' entertainments so gorgeously brilliant was its fabric, had quite concealed her. And knowing it was quite impossible to get away from Mrs. Hamper whenever she once saw anybody, she had resigned herself to the infliction, when she perceived to her horror that the Gudges were of the party.

"How are you, Sir Frederick?" said the attorney. "Did you get home all right the other night—eh? Your servant, Lady Arden; hope you didn't think we gave the Baronet too much wine? he! he!—eh? Mrs. Gudge—I think you recollect—eh? Not easily overlooked, as the saying is—he! he! Tootsey; Lady Arden."

"I hope you've got over the spasms, my lady," said Mrs. Gudge; "I know what they are, and can feel for you. There's nothing like a little O.D.V. and cardanums for them, though. Perhaps another time we may be more fortunate."

Lady Arden gave a freezing bow, as Sir Frederick commenced talking to the officers, as rapidly as he could upon whatever subject came uppermost, to divert their attention. For they were evidently diverted at the new comers. But Mr. Gudge was not to be so easily thrown over.

"I say, Sir F.—Sir F.! we're thinking of coming down to see you, some fine day next week," he continued. "Not to put you out, you know—we'll take pot luck; and our young ones must know one another."

"I regret to say I shall be at Brighton," coldly replied the Baronet, crimsoning with anger and confusion.

"Well—never mind that: any other time, you know. How long shall you stay there?"

"That will depend in a great measure on Lady Arden's health, Mr. Gudge."

"Come, Sir F., don't 'Mister' me; we're too good friends for that, you know—eh?" and he looked at him like a vulture; as he raised his hand to give him a familiar slap. But Sir Frederick recoiled, as an unmistakable expression of disgust passed over his features. At that moment he caught Lady Arden's eye, and bowing hurriedly to their unwelcome acquaintance, he followed her into the crowd, leaving the Gudge party amongst entire strangers: as Mrs. Hamper, hearing of some party coming off at the Mainwarings had turned her whole attention to them.

Sir Frederick was galled to the quick by the short interview with the attorney; and a few words of reproach from his wife, at the unpleasant rencontres his intimacy with the Gudges had exposed her to, and from which she could never be free whilst he noticed them, did not improve his temper. She knew that there must be some strangely important tie between Gudge and her husband to admit of such familiarity. Of this she had never received the slightest explanation; nor, from a wish

not to pry into the events of his life before marriage, had she ever pressed him for it. The present encounter had, however, irritated her, equally with Sir Frederick, and a few bitter words passed between them as the dashing crowd separated them for a time from their party.

The upbraidings of Lady Arden were not without their effect. Wearied himself of Gudge's presuming manners, and the constant drain upon his purse, Sir Frederick determined, then and there, to come to some final understanding—compromise, if need were—and shake off so obnoxious an incubus. He, therefore, hurriedly told his wife that she should be exposed to no further discomfort; and feeling in better heart than he had done for some time, from the mere notion of comparative freedom, they rejoined their friends; rejoiced to find that the others had fastened on to the Flacks, whom they had picked out at an incredible distance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHRISTOPHER IS ONCE MORE CARRIED AWAY.

KEEPING in his resolve, a day or two after the *fête*, Sir Frederick Arden started from home in his cab, with the determination of seeing Gudge, and, at all risks, bringing matters to a crisis.

On arriving at Coke Villa, however, he heard from the servant that her master was not at home; in fact, that he had left word he should be very late at his chambers upon business; and that he had taken Christopher with him, as he was sometimes in the habit of doing when pressed by his affairs. The Baronet accordingly left word that he would call again; and then went on to St. James's Street to get rid of an hour or two in the different clubs to which he belonged.

Here he found many idlers, who liked to talk with him—light-spirited gentlemanly young men, who were good companions, inasmuch as the wheels of their lives were so pleasantly oiled, that they never chafed their tempers. And these lounging west-enders were very fond of getting Sir Frederick Arden to talk to; for he was acquainted with every topic of the day, and, although not so young as many of them, was still perfectly one of their circle, and had the reputation of having been one of the fastest men upon town but a very few years back.

A small party of them insisted upon his dining with them; and as he supposed Gudge would be tolerably late, he joined the table. The conversation was smart and unflagging; the *menu* unexceptionable; and the wine above praise; so that the hours flew by upon those rosy wings which clever writers now and then speak of. At last Sir Frederick recollected that his cab was still waiting in the street; and resisting all their pressing invitations to finish another bottle of claret, or go to

the opera, or to join some wonderful *soirée* that was going to be given by no matter whom in Jermyn Street, at which they should be proud to introduce him—he quitted the club and once more set off upon his mission.

Caring less to meet Mr. Gudge in the domestic confidence of Coke Villa than in his chambers, he drove rapidly at once to Clement's Inn, expecting to find him still there, although the evening had tolerably well advanced. Making his way up the bare and creaking staircase, as well as the dull lamps on the landing allowed him, he was pleased to find the outer door open; and accordingly rang the bell.

We say he was pleased to find the oak "unsported;" for of the many musquitoe minor miseries of life which in their numbers torment far sharper than the heaviest afflictions, there is none which falls more chilling on the heart than the first glimpse of the dreary outer door, after climbing up the many flights of a set of chambers, with no other welcome to greet you than the written order to leave whatever you may have for the owner at the lodge. For whenever you call at chambers it is usually on matters of some importance, more or less. Idling visits are seldom paid there; mere calls of compliment, in which you hope to find the owner out, never; and although there is nothing more convivially comfortable than chambers filled with lively friends, with the happy consciousness that the man who owns the set below never sleeps in them, and that above there are only the chimney-pots; yet, than the view of the landing, with its two black doors, and their double addresses, nail-heads grinning letter-boxes and key-holes, there is nothing more ghastly.

The door was opened by Christopher, who told Sir Frederick that Mr. Gudge was still out, but had ordered him to wait there until he returned. The Baronet paused for a minute; and then informing the boy he would be back immediately, he went down to the street, dismissed his servant upon some extempore commission, and left his cab in the charge of some spectral cad, who rose up, apparently at his elbow, the instant his own man left. Bidding him wait there a minute or two, he returned to the chambers.

The wine he had taken at the club and his rapid drive had slightly excited him—not to any extent beyond sending his blood somewhat quicker through his veins, and crowding a few more ideas into his head than it was wont to contain. In a more composed state he would not have thought of acting as he was about to do, but his intended plan now appeared the best for his purpose that could be put into execution. The idea had sprung up, as he first saw Christopher alone, in the chambers. What if he was to take the boy off, and place him in a position—the notion of which struck him at the same moment—away from Gudge and unknown to him? The train once fired, the plan leapt on from one idea to another, and his determination was fixed. How he carried it out we shall see.

This time, with no one by to scrutinize his feelings, or observe their working, he did not meet the boy without some emotion. As he asked

him one or two important questions, he looked at him with an expression of the most intent curiosity; and then after a pause of a minute, to which a quick and tremulous expiration of the breath was the only break, he stamped his foot impatiently on the ground; as he muttered to himself:

"Pshaw! it may be better for him, and must be done. You are to go with me, my man," he continued aloud; "you need not be afraid; it is all right."

The announcement was so strange to Christopher; and his obedience to Mr. Gudge so implicit that not having received from the latter person any directions to that effect, he was at a loss how to reply. So he only stared at Sir Frederick Arden in great bewilderment.

"Come," said the Baronet impatiently; "get your hat, there's a good boy. I am only going a little way, and you must accompany me. Is this it?"

He took the gold banded hat with which Mrs. Gudge in the pride of her page had adorned him, and hurriedly putting it on the boy's head, led him from the chamber, kicking the outer door to, as they reached the landing.

"Mr. Gudge will be very angry, Sir," said Christopher; "he told me to be sure and not go away until he came back."

"Oh, no; he won't be angry," replied the other, hurriedly; "now come down stairs, and then you will see what I mean. Make haste."

In the Baronet's anxiety to quit the Inn before Mr. Gudge came back, he nearly accomplished Christopher's very rapid descent by the process of sending him down head over heels. In half a minute they were at the Pillars, and here Sir Frederick found his cab; which was undergoing a minute scrutiny from all the vendors of curds and whey, wheelks, and toffee there assembled.

"Here, my man," he cried to the phantom ostler, "there's sixpence for you. Jump in, Christopher. Sharp! there's a good boy. Leave go: all right!"

He lashed the horse, who leapt forward so suddenly that the red-jacketed cad was obliged to spring aside for his life, and went off along the Strand at a rattling pace—fearfully quick, considering the number of vehicles that crowded the thoroughfare—never speaking a word to his astonished little passenger, but venting his hurry and impatience upon the animal he was driving, until they were literally flying along the streets. The long undulating line of lights in Piccadilly were passed, right and left; and as they proceeded, the clusters down in the hollow on the left, that marked the position of the palace, twinkled and changed their position, and got mingled one with the other until they all appeared in motion. Suddenly the horse was pulled up at the entrance to some livery stables, with a jerk that nearly threw Christopher out of the cab over the front.

"Is Withers in the way?" asked the Baronet of one of the ostlers, who was standing at the corner.

"He's up the yard, Sir Fred'rick," said the man. "I'll fetch him in a minnut."

And in less than that space of time, the master came down.

"Harry," said the Baronet, "I want a good stout horse to-night, who can bear a little work ; for I may have to go a great way. Have you got one you can recommend?"

"Just the very thing, Sir Frederick : foaled a purpose for to-night, I should say. Spavvy, bring up the long-backed mare : look alive. Won't you pull in, Sir Frederick?"

"No, I'm pressed for time : trot her up here."

"Oh, she's a good one, Sir Frederick : would take you down to Brighton at a pull, if you wanted to go, in that light cab of yours. You'll have a queer night of it though, I'm thinking. It's coming down wet half-crowns on the pavement, now."

And, in truth, large drops of rain were beginning to fall as the foot-passengers hurried on in anticipation of a coming storm.

"There," continued the livery man, as the ostler brought up the mare, "that's her. She worked two year in the Suicide, that ran to Manchester in a day, and was got rid of because she was too fast for the others in the team. Wo ho ! lass."

Sir Frederick jumped from the cab, telling Christopher to remain where he was, and assisted the man to change the horses, which was accomplished in little more time than has been taken up in telling of it.

"Shall I send your horse to the Elms, Sir Frederick?" asked Mr. Withers ; "some of our people have got to go to the Star and Garter to-night."

"No, by no means !" replied the other, getting into the cab ; "keep him here, and take care of him till I come again. All right—tsit !"

The long-backed mare obeyed the order, and they were again on the road, spinning along by Hyde Park Corner, and turning off at Knightsbridge towards Brompton. Christopher began to think that he was returning to Mr. Gudge's ; but he was afraid to ask, more especially as Sir Frederick had not spoken a word to him since they first started.

The rain was coming down heavily, and every now and then a flash of lightning shewed that, anon, something more might be expected. As the gas lights were now fewer and further between, the Baronet determined to use his lamps, and drew up for the purpose at a public-house.

"Hi ! Bring me a light," he cried.

"Here you are, Sir," said the man, in defiance of practical truth, as he caught up a lantern.

"Which is the road to Kingston?" asked Sir Frederick, whilst the man was drawing out the lamps.

"Over Battersea Bridge I reckon's the best way," replied the helper ; "straight on and turn to the left."

"There's Sarah !" cried Christopher, as a girl, with a jug of beer in one hand, and an umbrella in the other, looked out of the publis-

house door to see how the rain was going on. "Halloo!" he continued, as he leant forward in the cab. "Halloo!—Sarah!"

"Hish!" exclaimed Sir Frederick, somewhat sharply; "keep back. Now, are the lamps ready? Stand out of the way: all right! I'll recollect you."

And away they went again.

"Well, he's a cool hand, anyhow," observed the ostler, as the cab whirled away. "I'll sell my chance of what he'll recollect for half a pint. I know his face, too."

Nobody appeared inclined to make the purchase, so the ostler bought it of himself incontinently, and enjoyed the proceeds of the sale in a similar fashion.

Meanwhile the cab rattled on, to the great dismay of Christopher, whose chief fear was founded on the scrape which he expected would await him for quitting Mr. Gudge's chambers. He was afraid to speak to Sir Frederick, who appeared only intent upon lashing the horse up to his highest speed, and shouting angrily at any body who got in his way. The rain had increased, and was coming down in torrents. The wheels whirled a continuous shower of mud into the glare of the lamps, and the steam from the horse's nostrils formed a couple of almost unbroken tracks in his wake.

On they went, until the gas-lights got fewer and fewer; at last ceasing altogether; and trees and hedges were just visible at the side of the road instead of houses and walls. Few people were about. Now and then they shot past some solitary traveller crouching from the rain; but the weather had driven every body to their homes; and the flashes of lightning, which now quickly followed each other, shewed that it was going to be an ugly night. Occasionally they passed through some villages, all the inhabitants of which were retiring to bed, as might be guessed from the lights in the upper houses. Then they crossed over a wide, open country, tearing down hill and hurrying up, scarcely without any difference in their speed, until, after an hour and a quarter's travelling, they approached a town. They clattered through some narrow streets; and at last Sir Frederick Arden pulled up the quivering and almost exhausted horse at the entrance to an inn-yard, in the old market-place of Kingston-upon-Thames. A cry immediately brought out the ostler.

"Get me a post-chaise," said the Baronet, "directly. And look here, take this horse and cab, and keep them until I return. Now, Christopher, my man, jump out. Come into the house with me whilst they are getting ready."

The little boy obeyed, and they entered the bar of the inn, in spite of all the persuasions of the landlord that they would go into the parlour; as he could not imagine, inwardly, how the owner of a cab and the bespeaker of a post-chaise could be comfortable any where else. Sir Frederick ordered some refreshment for Christopher, who, with all his confusion, not to say fright, stood somewhat in need of it, and hastily drank off a glass of brandy, neat, himself.

of the colliers, and was working his way as well as he best could towards the New Forest to join some charcoal-burners.

"Do you know this man?" asked Sir Frederick of Christopher.

"Yes," faltered the boy, directly adding, as Rockey was about to rise: "I won't go with him; he'll take me down the pit and kill me. Come away, Sir; pray come away!"

And he knelt down, and clasped his hands tightly round Sir Frederick's legs in his terror.

"Stop, my good boy," observed the Baronet. "Nobody here will hurt you." And he continued to Rockey: "You know this boy?"

"Oh! I knows him," growled the other, with a voice like an ogre's. "I knows him; and a precious deal of trouble he's been to me long afore now."

Whilst he was speaking, a long peculiar cry was heard in the distance.

"Here's the barge coming," said Andrews. "Now, mate, I reckon this is your conveyance."

Rockey implied that he was ready, and took up a small dirty bundle, supposed to contain his earthly possessions, when Sir Frederick exclaimed:

"Stop!—did I hear that you were going to the New Forest?"

"After a bit, master," replied the other. "Basingstoke's my first pitch; and then I shall get on as I can."

"You seem to be old friends," continued Sir Frederick, looking at Christopher. "Will you take charge of him, if I make it worth your while, to an address I shall give you in Southampton?"

"Oh, Sir! pray, pray let me stay here, or go back again!" cried Christopher, perfectly screaming with fear.

"Don't be afraid, my man," said Sir Frederick; "nobody shall harm you;" and he took a card from his pocket-book, and pencilled a few words on it, heedless of Christopher's further terror.

"I can hear the horses," said Andrews. "The men will stop here for a drain of beer. They're close at hand."

"I won't go," cried Christopher. "I'll go back to London, or to the salt-mine; but I won't go with him. I won't, I say!"

"Silence!" said Sir Frederick, sharply, as the barge came on, and was now in front of the house. "I tell you there is nobody to hurt you. I'm going to make your fortune."

"Ullow, pardner," observed the man who was guiding the horses on the towing-path, as he came in at the door. "Let's have half-a-pint; and where's our passenger?"

"All alive," said Rockey. "I think there's another coming. Have you room for two?"

"Half a dozen if you've got them," said the man.

"Sir—please, Sir!" cried Christopher, again appealing to Sir Frederick, as he clung to him with redoubled agony. "Let me stay with you. Rockey will murder me!"

"Oh I won't murder you," said the miner; "you know better than that if you choose; don't you? Come—come along. I'll mind him, Sir; I'm used to it. He's sharp as a eel though. Come here with you."

He dragged the boy away, notwithstanding the tight hold he kept of Sir Frederick, and pulled him, screaming, to the barge, on to which he all but flung him from the canal-bank. Andrews betokened no astonishment at the comparatively rapid scene. He had been used, in former times, when in the service of the family, to become an accomplice in so many of Sir Frederick Arden's adventures, that a matter of treble the excitement would not have moved him.

"I hope that fellow won't hurt the lad," said the Baronet, as Christopher's cries grew fainter in the continued roar of the storm, whilst the barge was towed on. "Give me some brandy, Andrews; and take out some to the post-boy. He must be drenched."

The inn-keeper did as he was ordered, and then summoned the chariot up to the door to return again. Sir Frederick enjoined silence respecting the scene which had just taken place; but it was scarcely necessary. Then throwing himself back in the corner of the carriage, he directed the man to proceed at once to his house at Richinond, intending to send one of his people over for his cab in the morning, and telling him that his haste was most urgent; and that, in consequence, not being near a posting-house, he must contrive to make the same horses do for the remainder of the journey.

Stimulated by the brandy, and a promise of reward if he reached "The Elms" by a certain time, the man commenced to retrace the road by which they had arrived at the beer-shop. But this was by no means an easy task. Andrews ran in front of them a little way with a lantern to get them clear of the canal-bank; but his progress was soon stopped; for the torrents of rain had so swelled the water-courses which intersected the low ground in every direction, that scarcely anything was visible but a sheet of water, from which a few pollards rose, gaunt and scathed, as the only guides to the edge of the road; and these were not to be discerned in the intervals of the lightning: for the lamps of the carriage were now burning dimly, and threatened shortly to go out.

But the postillion kept on, spurring and thrashing the horses, who, what with their punishment, their uncertain footing, and the thunder and lightning, were snorting and quivering with fright, until they got upon the regular road again, when feeling their way once more comparatively safe before them, they started off almost at a gallop.

Sir Frederick, who, during the journey across the wilder tract, had been directing the man as well as he was able, now put up the glass of the window again, and once more gave himself up to his thoughts which were confused and almost bewildering. Still there was a feeling of satisfaction as he felt tolerably assured, if all went as he had planned, that Christopher was safely disposed of, until further arrangements could be made. And this was increased by the rapidity with

which, in spite of their previous work, the horses were now being urged along.

At last they came to a high wooden bridge, of an irregularly steep, and unsafe build, over which the road was carried in an awkward turn, and which spanned the junction of the canal with the river Wey before they both fell into the Thames. As the horses, without relaxing their pace, almost climbed up the slope, just as they reached the top of the arch, a vivid flash of lightning that for the moment lighted up everything with dazzling clearness, broke full on their faces, closely followed by a clattering peal of thunder, which appeared to shake the very earth. Already frightened, they backed suddenly, and before the postillion had the least mastery over them, they drove the hind-wheels of the chariot against the wooden post and rails on the top of the bridge, which were rotten and insecure from age. Those gave way in an instant, and as Sir Frederick started forward from his seat to learn the cause of the check, the whole equipage was precipitated into the dark foaming water of the lock directly underneath them.

The heavy chariot had of course dragged the horses after it, and still fastened to the pole, they fell, kicking and struggling fearfully, half across the top of the flood gates. The pole directly snapped; and the horse which the postillion was riding got free as his harness was torn away by the weight, and fell into the comparatively shallow water below the pound of the lock. But the other was pulled, battling with his hoofs against the timbers, after the chariot; until he hung suspended, as it were, by the chain and the entanglement of the broken pole and harness in the wood-work.

For a second or two, and no more, the interior of the chariot remained dry, for the windows were still up. But as the animal, in a frantic plunge, kicked in the front glasses, the water rushed in and it filled immediately, settling down in the deep enclosure of the lock, and drawing the horse after it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LITTLE MILLINERS RECEIVE THEIR FRIENDS.

BESSY PAYNE was sitting at work, all by herself, in her little bed-room, singing a duet with her bird, whose cage hung outside the window in the warm afternoon sunlight.

It was more pleasant and airy at the top of the house in fine weather than down in the dusty parlour, where she could not open the window for the fashions displayed in it. And Bessy's room was a back one, and looked upon an unbuilt-over hollow kind of field, just green enough to swear by, and fertile in brick-bats and oyster shells. It was not an open bit, for a fence of rough boards enclosed it; but the boys had broken some of these away; and they now ran in and out to play

whenever they liked, the sport deriving keener excitement from the idea, so charming to boys in general, that they had no right to be where they were.

There was a board on a pole at the corner of the ground, but whether it was to warn people away by threats of apocryphal engines always ready to go off, or whether it announced the possibility of buying any portion of the land on a building lease, was equally unintelligible. For the top half was broken away altogether, and the remnant had been so pelted, and shot at, and otherwise grossly insulted that it was now only fit to be introduced into a picturesque landscape. There was not much about it, however, to keep up the idea: nor in any way to promote reflection—except the oyster shells. And it was curious to think how they ever came there. It was not a place people would enter, by choice, for the express purpose of eating oysters: and they could not have been pitched down there, because of the enclosure. But there they were; and there they had been ever since Bessy Payne's bright eyes had overlooked the ground.

The sun was shining, and the bird was singing; and a tolerably pure air came from the Surrey hills, and flirted with the leaves of the scarlet runners that were trained upon various bits of string round the window, starting from the flower-pot on the sill, which had, in its time been sadly in the wars, and was now kept together by a bit of bonnet-wire. And, as we said, Bessy was singing too: nothing from an opera, nor yet anything that had ever been heard at a concert; yet for all that, a song which would not have sounded badly—but that a man might have stopped a while to hear, without considering his time thrown away—on a summertide evening, in some pleasant country nook. And as Bessy sang it her thoughts were altogether in the country, for she had come from it; until, like a dissolving view, all the rows of houses, dusty and glowing as they were, turned into thick-leaved waving trees, and blue waters flowed across the ground, and the oyster shells swelled out into white sheep dotting the fields. The very bird appeared to have given himself up to the same delusion; for he chirruped, and rushed from one perch to the other—which must have been a journey that proved rather monotonous from frequent repetition—just as if he thought he was on an open tree in a copse.

From the paper patterns which, from time to time Bessy kept placing against her own trim figure, and then comparing them with her work, anybody might have guessed that it was for herself; and from the fabric, which was of a delicate, filmy nature, notions of some sort of festivity instantly presented themselves. And now and then breaking off her song suddenly, she would rise from her work, and perform a lively measure across her room, exclaiming "one two three, and one two three, and one two three, a step and a jump;" all which things being put together looked very like an anticipation of some festivity.

"Oh! my goodness, Letty! how nearly I knocked you down," cried Bessy, as after a pretty vigorous waltz with her only chair, she came

against Miss Twits who entered the room at the moment. "Well—you are back soon: and can they come? Sit down—oh! I forgot—the chair's my partner. Now tell me all about it, for I'm quite out of breath."

And Miss Twits took the chair, as Bessy pulled out her box, and sat down upon it.

"I wish I had your spirits, dear," said Miss Twits with much sentimental feeling.

"Lor! you have, you know, Letty; twice as good; only you won't believe it. I feel low and dull sometimes—not very often though—and when I am, I say to myself, it's bad enough to be out of spirits, but I won't make them worse by thinking about it. And then I get up and dance—just for a change you know—and perhaps a funny idea comes into my head, and I laugh!—you know how I can laugh!"

Miss Twits shook her head, but whether to imply ignorance or express melancholy pleasure was difficult to tell.

"Oh—but I do, Letty. Really it's very easy to be happy; and never costs anything. If you haven't done anything very wrong, such as murdering anybody—and you know you never did—there's no reason why one shouldn't be always merry."

Miss Twits was about to say something about wrecked attachments, when Bessy interrupted her by going on—

"And so they will really come; oh how nice it will be!"

And she was evidently about to dance again, when Miss Twits stopped her.

"Listen, Bessy," she said. "I am scarcely able to believe it, but I must make a confidant of you. I never thought to love again after he"—(here Miss Twits swallowed a large mouthful of air with great determination, and then spasmodically composed herself)—"but no matter; that is past."

Bessy opened her eyes, and looked at Miss Twits, as much as to say, "What is coming next?"

"What I half expected—perhaps hoped—yet scarcely dared to think I did," continued the other, "has come to pass. He has—forgive this agitation—he—"

"What? the jolly man!" cried Bessy.

"Yes, Mr. Chirpey has this morning—excuse me, dearest, but call him by his proper name in future—has this morning—dear! dear—"

"Popped the question?" asked Bessy.

"Proposed," replied Miss Twits, with an improving importance.

"I went to speak to him about my birthday, and he told me he had a subject of greater consequence than that to talk to me about. My dear, you might have knocked me down with a minikin, when he asked me if I thought Chirpey was as good a name as Twits?"

"And what did you say, Letty?"

"I know not," said Miss Twits; "but I must have given a favour—"

able reply, for I came away his affianced one. There is but one struggle more—one sacrifice—and all will be over.”

Bessy began to speculate upon what this might be, as Miss Twits, after much gulping and internal commotion, drew a small packet from her bosom, which looked like a flattened curl paper, and was slightly transparent, increasing the resemblance. Opening this, she took from it a small short lock of hair, having more the appearance of a camel's hair paint brush pulled out of its quill, than anything else, and she bent over the relic of former love nodding her head in reply to internal speculations, and endeavouring to shed a tear—the whole performance being the result of a careful study of ‘Mabel the Mildewed’ combined with a vivid recollection of Alice with Walter Barnard's purse in the ‘Wreck Ashore.’ And then she looked as if she was going to raise it to her lips with the aid of both hands—it being apparently of a ponderous nature—when she suddenly checked herself, exclaiming:

“No—no; I am another's; the dream is past!”

And approaching the window, she turned her head away as she threw out the memorial of the false one.

“I cannot bear to look. Is it gone?” she asked of Bessy.

“Not quite; I can see it,” replied the little milliner. “It's going to lodge on the spout: no—it isn't; it's off again, just as the wind took it.”

“The last plunge has been made then?” observed Miss Twits.

“No, it hasn't,” said Bessy, still watching the relic. “Oh, it's twisting round and round, and now—oh! now the old fowl has run after it, and eaten it up. No, he hasn't: he don't like it. I can't see it any more.”

Still Miss Twits could not distil a tear, although she would have given a good deal to have done so.

“Come, Letty; now let us talk about your birthday. Tom has arranged all for the evening; and has got leave to come away an hour earlier, and the man next door will put up the shutters for him, and the jolly—I beg his pardon—Mr. Chirpey, will come with his brother, the steward: and who do you think?—Miss Warwick and Miss Vavasour—there!”

Miss Warwick and Miss Vavasour were two young ladies attached to the corps-de-ballet of the Opera, who lived near Miss Twits's millinery establishment, and employed her extensively in the manufacture of tarlatane skirts, and flesh-coloured silk bodies. The name of Miss Warwick's father and mother, who kept an eating-house, was Jinks; and Miss Vavasour had a brother—a young cabinet-maker—named Lobbins: so that the cognominations of the young ladies had been apparently changed. And this had been possibly effected, not by coming into property and paying a good round sum to have it done, but quite simply and effectively by their own letters patent.

Then the lady's-maid to Mrs. Botolph—who had a villa at Brixton,

and drove every afternoon in a brougham to fetch Mr. Botolph away from a warehouse in Lower Thames' Street—this lady's-maid, who was also a customer, was coming; and she asked permission to bring the young man 'she kept company with,' whom she described as 'a pretty dancer,' and who was going to marry her in the autumn, and take a small public-house at Balham Hill.

And they had also insured the presence of M. Fandango and his accomplished daughter, with four pupils. M. Fandango was a professor of dancing in the New Cut, and spoke very good English indeed for a foreigner—remarkably so. He had taught Bessy and Miss Twits, and at his select academy, every Monday and Thursday evening, they had become acquainted with the pupils whom they expected, and who were to open the ball by performing an Olio Figure, which comprised all the dances of the universe, and various other places: and as Monsicur Fandango observed, was a great favourite in the high circles. The pretty girl at Lambeth House, who always tried on "gent's dress kid" so bewitchingly, that the customers bought any size she pleased—the standard numbers of gloves being vague in the transpontine districts—was also coming; as was Mr. Raddles, an elegant young man in the same establishment, who handed chairs to ladies, and shewed them parasols. So that altogether there was a chance of its being a capital party.

Sprouts begged to take the music under his own direction; and, in this, the recollection of an old friend had somewhat influenced him. Skittler, amidst his many accomplishments, was no mean performer on the fiddle—the honest old-fashioned fiddle, that only played jovial dances: not the richly oily over-genteel modern violin. So Tom secured a five shilling engagement for him and 'his merry bit of wood' as he was wont to call it; and promised, in addition, that he should be well taken care of, and have lots to drink.

Without doubt the expenses of this lavish entertainment would have fallen heavily on the slender purses of Miss Twits and Bessy; but the jolly man had told them that he would look after all that part of the entertainment, so they took him at his word and let him. His brother too, the steward, came out uncommonly upon the occasion. He promised them that as soon as the boat came back her last turn from Gravesend, he would send up all the cold joints there were on board, and perhaps something else. And if they wanted any glasses—which it was possible they might, their own stock being confined to two tumblers and a Lowther Arcade egg-cup—he told them he would send up hundreds. So they availed themselves also of his liberality. Bessy and Miss Twits were so busy, having to make their own dresses as well as those of several of their visitors, that they were obliged to get an extra hand. And besides the dresses, they manufactured a whole clothes-basket full of silver-paper water-lilies, to make the room look festive; and the first-floor was good enough to say that they might put all their spare furniture in

that apartment, which, as their own space was limited, was very agreeable, and of course led to the first-floor being invited, partly out of gratitude, and partly out of charity, inasmuch as there was a probability of the first-floor's beauty-sleep being somewhat disturbed.

The jolly man called every day until the night arrived. He used to say it was to see what was wanted, but he always talked to Miss Twits so much longer than Bessy thought necessary for anything short of supplies for a whole empire, that it is presumed they found other topics of conversation. But this was never known for a certainty, as Bessy, on such occasions, discreetly withdrew. However, Mr. Chirpey's visits were always followed by a present: and sometimes he even brought bottles in his pocket. And as his brother, the steward, kept his word also, when the night arrived, there had come more refreshments than the little kitchen could well hold.

Sprouts came first: he had promised to do so at Bessy's request, to light the candles, hand the tea, and make himself generally useful, even to opening the door, if the charwoman was otherwise engaged. His appearance was very striking: by his usual contrivances with string, glue, sealing-wax, and ink, he had managed to turn out in singular style. He might, to be sure, have borrowed one or two articles of his wardrobe, inasmuch as his waistcoat was evidently meant for a man four times his size; and his stock would not meet very well behind, but shewed a good deal of neck and buckle. His general effect, however, was pronounced to be a hit. As for Miss Twits and Bessy, they looked perfect ladies: if you can call to mind the dress with the most flounces you ever saw, and then multiply that by six, adding a dozen bows to the product, and dividing it by a pink band, you will have some faint notion of their costume.

No notes had been written, but everybody was told to come at eight, and at ten minutes to that time Skittler arrived. He had adopted the fashion of the Court, and wore knee breeches; but they were of a lighter colour than, and different texture to those seen at the Palace. He had clean white stockings, brightly blacked high-logs, that flashed again in the light—for there were six candles all burning at once in the room—and the newest of velveteen jackets. And after he had made the same bow to Bessy and Miss Twits that he would have done to the highest lady in the land, had she come for a potatoe, or any other circumstance had thrown him into communication with her, he took his place in a corner, with a jug of porter underneath his stool, and winking on the sly to Sprouts, told him in confidence that he hoped the ladies wouldn't take it amiss, but he'd brought up his can, with some of the best Irish fruit he could get, for their acceptance.

"Oh, Tom!" said Bessy, as the Dutch clock pointed to twenty minutes to three and struck eleven—the combination signifying that it was eight precisely, after the dissolute manner of Dutch clocks in

general. "Oh, Tom, I feel so nervous for fear we shouldn't go off well."

"Go off well!" said Tom, "you'll go off like a regular rocket—all stars and no stick. What are you afraid of?"

"Well, I don't know, Tom: perhaps, that it will be dull."

"Oh, you think so, Miss Payne, do you?" asked Tom. "And with me here! Look at that."

Whereat Tom pulled his coat tightly to his figure to show it off, and spun round on his heel, finishing in an attitude which was shaken from its elegance by another knock at the door. This was the arrival of Monsieur Fandango, with his daughter and four pupils: who did not enter at once, as they all put on their pumps, and crammed their walking shoes into remote nooks and corners, in the passage.

But when they did come in, they were worth the pause. Monsieur had his coat-tails lined with white glazed calico; and his daughter and all the pupils were in fancy dresses. The young priestess of Terpsichore had a Cracovienne costume, rather short, with red boots and jingling button-moulds pegged on to the heels; and two of the gentlemen pupils took off their coats, and shewed their shirt sleeves, tied round with ribbons, which gave them an appearance rather Tyrolean than otherwise. The ladies were attired, one as a Scotch lassie, and the other as a Neapolitan—both dresses being easily achieved by a plaid scarf and black feathers in one case, and a square bit of pasteboard covered with calico and worn on the head, in the other. They saluted the rest with much courtesy as they entered the room; indeed, Mademoiselle Fandango made such a low reverence, that she went all down, like the dreadful images you compress into a snuff-box to startle nervous acquaintances; and Sprouts wondered what had possibly become of her legs in the performance.

The company soon came—arriving, in the emphatic, but somewhat unsatisfactory words of Sprouts "all in a lump, as the boy found sixpence." Mr. Chirpey carried so many things with him, that he could hardly get in at the door; and if it had not been that Miss Warwick and Miss Vavasour were close behind him, the chances are he would scarcely have accomplished it. The *coryphées* were most splendidly dressed,—even to exciting jealous feelings in the Fandango alliance; and looked very like nymphs, especially about their heads, which were surrounded by silver leaves, and pink roses. They only wanted a pair of transparent fire-screen wings to be complete.

The ball did not commence until every body had arrived for it was to open with the Fandango Olio; and the professor did not choose to shew off his talent until he had a good audience; since in the display, which gave such brilliancy to the party, he had an eye to future pupils. But when all was ready, he ranged the company round the room; and taking the violin, accompanied the Olio himself. For Skittler's know-





The Old Lady

ledge of national airs was confined to those of England; whereas the professor's ranged from an Indian war dance to a Chinese hornpipe. He could have taught and played the North Pole Gavotte had it been requisite.

The Olio got great applause. Mademoiselle Fandango first danced the Cracovienne, which was a succession of kicks and stamps,—as though her boots were not well on,—and kissing of hands to the audience, all of which Misses Warwick and Vavasour regarded with a patronising smile. Then the pupils performed a curious figure, flirting with their partners, and placing apparently all their happiness upon an old artificial rose, which they tantalized each other with. And the steps were such happy conglomerations of the Cachucha, Pas Styrien, Lilt, Tarantella, and Fling, that the spectators got perfectly bewildered with what they were seeing. They were a little too crowded to be sure; but that did not much matter; and when the final arrangement was presented to them, in which the two gentlemen knelt on one knee, and the two young ladies stood upon their others, whilst Mademoiselle Fandango crouched in an attitude of supplication before them, with her hands clasped on her breast, the applause was tremendous. Bessy and Miss Twits were in ecstasies, which were only moderated at finding that the ladies of the ballet, whom they regarded as great authorities in such matters, did not think much about it.

The Olio finished, and the dancing began in earnest. They did not keep at all to the conventional first set; but they went through marvelous figures, Circassian Waltzes, Caledonians, Lancers, and other elegant dances, that the genius of Monsieur Fandango rendered popular in the neighbourhood. Tom, who owed his knowledge of them entirely to Bessy's tuition, went through them pretty well. Sometimes, to be sure, his legs got all away from him, and appeared to be hastening to other parts of the room, to the great confusion of the bystanders; but, on the whole, it was a commendable performance, and as those who had been once knocked over by him, got out of the way the next time, it was only his first steps that cost him any trouble. As for Skittler, he was the admiration of the entire assembly, from his increasing energy. What with beating time with his feet, and keeping it with his head, he danced as much as any of them although he never left his seat. Indeed he laboured so vigorously that Mr. Chirpey often brought the dancers to a standstill by insisting that he should have some beer; and as that jolly man only joined in country dances, he would at times stand before Skittler and perform a little *pas* by himself, setting to him and looking doubly pleasant all the while, as is the habit of jolly men generally when they hear a band. Only to be perfect they should have a pipe in their hands. But Bessy and Letty had agreed there should be no pipes until after supper; because Miss Warwick and Miss Vavasour who met lords and guardsmen at fashionable public balls had told them that tobacco was never introduced until that time.

Mr. Chirpey's steward-brother undertook to superintend the refreshments, as dancing stewards are unknown; and there he was all the night making punch in a wash-hand basin, and tasting it very often to see that it was all right, which is a process your punch-makers are greatly given to, being as much self-conceited with their concoction as everybody is upon his own method of poking a fire. And although not so potent as you might have tasted at the Blue Posts in Cork Street, or the Cheshire Cheese in Wine Office Court, it was pronounced exceedingly delicious, and had as desirable effect upon the hilarity of the dancers, as could be desired.

Monsieur Fandango was worth his presence with his pupils. For they knew no fatigue; and when the grand dances ceased, his accomplished daughter was always ready with a Milanese hornpipe, or something of the kind to delight the company. Her new dance, *La Lambethienne*, invented by the professor, was a great treat. The pupils, also, reflected much credit on the establishment in a double rowing hornpipe, descriptive of the life of a sailor from his launch until his lay up in port; and in spite of the affirmation of Miss Warwick and Miss Vavasour made in an under tone to Mr. Raddles, that no *coryphée* would dance it, whatever the ballet-master might compel the "extras" to do, the applause at the conclusion was very general. Indeed, the last tableau, when quite unexpectedly they all produced union-jack pocket-handkerchiefs, at the same moment, and held them up as if to dry, emblematical, as Monsieur Fandango, observed of old England's naval glory, was pronounced almost affecting.

And once Mr. Chirpey, who would not dance much, volunteered his song about the courtship under the umbrella, which made great fun for every body, except the young lady pupils, who caught their partners, looking at Miss Warwick and Miss Vavasour instead of themselves, when there were certain allusions in the song to a kiss given under cover of the friendly shelter. But the cloud soon passed; for the time was too bright to allow any shadows to linger, and if anybody had felt gloomy for an instant one look at Bessy Payne's sunny face, or, failing her, at the shining eyes of the pretty girl who tried the gloves on so well at Lambeth House, would soon have lighted up their spirits again.

At last supper time came; and where do you think it was laid? Where, but down in the kitchen, so snug and cosy; and there it had been all day, only locked up for fear of cats and accidents. There does not appear to have been many barley-sugar bird-cages or maccaroon baskets; and we have no clear records of cracker bonbons, or champagne. But there was a cold round of beef and a dish of pickled salmon, that would have provoked a sharper appetite than all the dinner pills ever taken; and in the middle was a fruit pie; and there were plates of cherries and currants, and above all other things, shrimps and prawns, which the steward had brought up, steaming from the copper, in little linen bags that morning from Gravesend. And lastly, Skittler—who on the first announcement of supper had put his fiddle in a corner, and left the room—placed, in a large wooden bowl, scrubbed until

there was a perfect white bloom all over it, a quantity of the most noble baked potatoes that had ever been seen. There appeared to be no end to them. He kept producing them from his can, as the necromancers do the eggs from the mystic bag, until at last they not only filled the bowl, but made a perfect pyramid above it. Upon which Mr. Chirpey cried "Bray-vo !" and applauded with the handle of his knife, until all the guests did the same ; and then he was for some time lost to society, whilst he drew corks more rapidly than the keeper of a ginger beer booth in the racing dog-days.

There were not seats for above half the number, anatomically considered ; but somehow or another they all contrived to find places. The steward had the beef under his own management ; and when the jolly man had drawn corks enough to have floated the Great Britain, had she been down at the time, he took his place at the head of the table between Miss Twits and Bessy. Then we rather think the fun did begin ; especially when Mr. Chirpey told them, when their plates were dirty to turn them topsy turvey and go on again : and that Miss Twits and Miss Bessy Payne did not grudge them anything they liked to eat, only it was hoped that they would not put anything in their pockets. Then he took beer with everybody, commencing with Sprouts, who would not, he hoped, pocket the spoons, as he did at that last unfortunate meeting, when Bessy said, "Oh, now ! what a story ! I'm sure he never did." Tom acknowledged this championship of his innocence by giving her a pinch, at which Bessy screamed, in the prettiest manner imaginable ; and the jolly man told Sprouts with a severe face that if he did that again he would transport him for seven hours to the back kitchen, until he found them all at breakfast on his return.

To Monsieur Fandango he was especially attentive ; and thought it polite to talk French to him, which consisted in saying "Come on voo parly voo, kesker say paddy whack bang !" which phrase Monsieur Fandango did not perfectly comprehend. But as it would have been equally incomprehensible to him, had it been pure French instead of this singular *patois*, that was of little consequence.

Skittler took his place upon the dresser, and after the manner of the court, performed popular airs uninterruptedly, until Bessy and Sprouts insisted that he should take some supper. For nobody was proud ; and they soon in a measure considered Skittler as one of the company, and no mean member of it. In fact, apart from his dress, had it not been that he somewhat betrayed his ignorance of fashionable society by persisting in removing imaginary froth from the top of his pewter with his cuff ; and saying "Here's to everybody," every time he drank, he would have made a great hit.

The merriment was at its height, and to-morrow was considered altogether a fiction ; when a noise of wheels was heard to cease at the door, and then a loud knocking startled everybody into silence, as though twenty chairmen's hammers had been detonating all at once. It

was a wonder how the slender snake who formed the knocker, and was always endeavouring to crawl backwards down his own throat was not shattered to pieces by the attack.

Bessy started from her seat ; so did Miss Twits ; and the jolly man asked who else was expected. There was no one to come ; everybody had arrived ; and whilst they were wondering who it could be the knock was repeated, accompanied by an equally violent assault upon the first floor's bell.

"Tisn't a runaway knock—that's certain," said Sprouts, "I ought to know, for I've given a few. They never try it on twice. Don't disturb yourselves ; I'll go and see."

Sprouts, with no small exertion, unwedged himself from where he was seated, and strode upstairs, leaving the company in mingled expectation and timidity. He opened the door ; and there soaked by the rain, which was coming down like one huge waterspout, and had nearly drenched him through and through, stood Mr. Gudge !

Tom's first impulse was to slam the door to, and run away ; but, immediately recollecting that he was now independent, he thought he would have a bit of fun to himself ; so he said :

"Why, they haven't asked *you*—have they ? My eye !"

"Oh you're here—are you ?" asked Gudge, by way of reply. "And what are you about ?"

"About five feet eleven," returned Sprouts, having learned to be extra sharp from the boys in the court who, until he showed fight, had been accustomed to beat him every night when he put the shutters up. "Oh—don't think you'll frighten me," he continued, as Mr. Gudge assumed a threatening attitude. "I'm not in your clutches now you know." And he half put himself in an attitude of squaring,

"Pshaw !" said Mr. Gudge, as he advanced further into the passage, and heard the sounds of a fiddle accompanying a jolly voice in a song, down stairs. "Ah ! I thought so. Skittler's here—isn't he ?"

"I should rather think he was," replied Sprouts. "Did he ask you ?"

"Nonsense, Sir !" cried the attorney, resuming some of his ancient authority. "Go and tell him, he's wanted immediately—that he must come with me."

"Oh yes," said Tom ; "likely ; isn't it ? Just as if he'd cut us for you."

"Bah !" replied the attorney in awful indignation, as, pushing Tom on one side with his hand, he walked along the passage banging the door behind him, which was immediately followed by the echo of the knocker provoked by the cabman who thought he was going to cheat him.

"I say ?" cried Tom : "have you any right to go there."

"I shall go where I please—ass !" returned Mr. Gudge, as he

strode on, and descending the stairs, closely followed by Sprouts, entered the supper room.

The jolly man's song had just concluded, and the applause attendant thereupon ushered Gudge into the room. But the instant his apparition appeared at the door all the noise ceased, and every eye was turned upon him. He was never a very festive looking man, but now—drenched, in a measure, as he was, with rain—with a drooping collar and a head of hair that resembled a piece of door mat in the sunset, he was the last man in the world that would have been supposed about to join such a merry party as were assembled in that kitchen.

"Don't let me put you out," he said, as he perceived the sudden silence his presence had caused; and Miss Twits and Bessy Payne, who recollected in a minute their last fearful interview, turned pale with terror, and expected no less than that they were all immediately to be taken off to Newgate, or the Tower of London, or, as Miss Twits tremulously thought, the dreaded Bastile, wherein so many a noble heart had—had—but she could not call to mind what. "Don't let me put you out."

"Oh! it would take a far better than you to do it," said Sprouts, proud to display his courage before the company, and behind Mr. Gudge, at whose back he had been indulging in demoniac grimaces, of an extension never seen but in a moving countenance of a magic lantern.

"Ullow, guv'nor, here's luck!" observed Skittler, bowing to him over his jug, which might have kept company with the purse of Fortunatus for its inexhaustible qualities. "Glad to see you, Sir, and didn't expect it. Now don't, Sprouts; it isn't manners."

The last observation was directed to Tom, who had fitted the heads of various consumed prawns on the tops of his fingers, which gave them a demoniac appearance, and was intended, as he extended his arms, to show the company an anticipation of the fate to which every body connected with the various branches of the law is popularly doomed. Mr. Gudge hit back, and as Sprouts bobbed away, his knuckles went against the door.

"Don't disturb yourselves," repeated Mr. Gudge, pretending that he did not hurt himself, after the manner of people in public generally when they do. "Skittler, I want you." He said this with determination. The musician put down his fiddle, and, with a grave face, went to Mr. Gudge, who retreated into the passage, pushing Sprouts into the kitchen and closing the door after him.

"I learnt from some of the vagabonds at the Pillars," he said, "that you were here; and a precious job I have had to find you. The boy, Christopher, has been taken away somewhere, and you must track him. Get your hat, and come at once."

"But, you see, guv'nor," replied Skittler, who did not much appear to like quitting his quarters, "I've got a deal to get through here first," and he looked wistfully at some bread and meat he held in his hand. "And how shall I know what to do?"

"Leave that to me," said Gudge. "My servant swears she saw the boy in a cab when she went for the beer, and that Sir Frederick Arden was in it, and asked the way to Kingston. That's enough—eh?—do you see?"

"Oh, I see—I see fast enough," answered Skittler, pulling his neck-handkerchief about with an uncomfortable air, as if it was too tight for him.

"Well, then, that's enough," said Gudge. "So tell these people they must kick their heels about to somebody else's noise; and then follow me."

Mr. Gudge returned up stairs, whilst Skittler went back and excused himself as he best could to the company, over whom the apparition of Mr. Gudge had thrown a temporary feeling of bewilderment. The regrets were, as may be conceived, most touching; but he promised to leave his fiddle, upon which Monsieur Fandango offered to perform, being occasionally relieved by the steward; and then taking a farewell glass for luck, he went after his employer, to start upon his somewhat hazy expedition.

But his departure did not quite quell the gaiety; for when the milk-maid, whose bright pails shone in the morning sun, came with the milk, instead of waiting the few minutes she was accustomed to, her ring was answered by several of the company, who, amongst them, consumed nearly all her stock, Mr. Chirpey standing ha'porths round. And the last excitement was the departure of Monsieur Fandango, his daughter, and the four pupils, in a hackney-coach, surrounded by a running guard of admiring boys, who, after a series of single combats with Sprouts at the door, followed the professor and his party with cheers, all the way from Bessy Payne's to the domestic temple of Terpsichore, in which he ordinarily resided.

CHAPTER XXV.

SOME DISTINGUISHED TRAVELLERS ARRIVE AT VENICE.

You must suppose that six years have elapsed since the events which closed the last chapter. If you will but call to mind how often you have said, with relation to some equally distant occurrence in your own life, "It seems but yesterday," the tax upon your imagination will not, after all, be so heavy.

And you must allow your author to carry you to another land. You must imagine a strange and noiseless city, with silent highways of water for countless boats, instead of rattling thoroughfares for cabs and carts, looking for all the world like rows of ruined Reform Club-houses built on the banks of the Serpentine. Strange black looking craft, like floating hearses glide about the streets, giving you the idea that one half of the population is burying the other half; and every now and then you come upon a view, which you appear to be already well acquainted with, from a perforated-card water-colour drawing in an album, or a print in an annual, or some dining-room picture, associated with an agreeable party, heat-frosted claret jugs and early asparagus.

You will see no trees—a Bloomsbury-square lilac would be a grove by comparison. And you will meet no horses—the most wretched cab-hack in London might be kept for a show, and create a great sensation. The thoroughfares are all alleys, and the alleys are nothing but back-doors leading to narrow bridges crossing small stagnant canals making you think every instant that you are coming to some docks. But you are not, nevertheless. And you may soon miss your way if you lose sight of any of the landmarks, resembling square parish churches, with cheap obelisks on their summit, which rise in so many directions. The boats are called gondolas; the square towers, campaniles; and the name of the place itself is Venice.

You cannot get there by land. The city lies out away from the shore, high and dry, like the Goodwin Sands at low water. So you go in boats—first along rows of extended Puddle-docks: and then over what might be taken for a huge flooded race-course, the posts and rails of which just appear above the water, so that there is no great fear of drowning; the whole tract reminding intelligent travellers of the Essex marshes out at sea. And before getting there you must not be quite led away by the poets, who are from time to time taken so poorly respecting its beauties; because the approach thereto from Mestré—which is to Venice what Twickenham is to Eel Pie Island—is not exactly like the dioramas and descriptions you have formed your notions from. In fact in common-place minds it may suggest unfavourable comparisons with Wapping, until the passage-boat emerges into the great water-street of this amphibious city of human beavers.

In one of these boats when we again commence our story,—a huge lumbering contrivance that could only have been imitated by placing

the body of an omnibus upon an empty lighter—a party of English travellers were being brought up to the steps of the Administration of Posts, on their first arrival. They consisted of a gentleman and two ladies, with a footman and a lady's maid—the entire quintette being attired in the most extravagant fashion, both as regarded their dresses and liveries. The rest of the boat was filled entirely with luggage; even beyond the cabin, if so it might be called, leaving scarcely room for the hinder gondolier to scull; especially as half his time was taken up in endeavouring to keep a large restless carpet-bag, stuffed like a ship's fender, and perched on the top, from tumbling into the water. At last, as the craft struck against one of the striped ricketty poles which border the canal, the shock sent it overboard and down it went.

"What the devil and all his infernal imps are you at now?" said the gentleman in a voice of boiling-point anger; prefacing the exclamation by a string of fine old British oaths which need not here be repeated, as he tried to let down one of the windows of the gondola.

But of all those things which never will be hurriedly treated, the windows of public conveyances are the most stubborn, resisting all attempts to move them quickly with remarkable tenacity. No one was ever yet able to tell a cabman that he had taken the wrong turning, from this cause, until he had got a quarter of a mile beyond it; and gondolas, which may be termed the cabs of the ocean, partake of the complaint. At last, however, after pulling up successively a small Venetian blind, a shutter, and the leather strap itself, right away, the traveller managed to open the window and put out his head, crushing his hat in the process with a noise like a fractured band-box.

"Why—you thick-headed brigand—you've never let my carpet-bag fall into the water?" he continued as he saw that unit of his luggage on one of the submerged steps of the office.

"Si, Signor," replied the Gondolier touching his cap—not in any way comprehending the question but thinking it incumbent upon him to return some sort of an answer.

"See it, Signor," continued the traveller. "See, indeed! yes and so do I. Why—why, it's full of things worth twenty of your thick heads put together. Well! is it to lie there always—eh? Pick it up directly!"

He quite roared the last words out, in his anger; to the great delight of several idle fellows who were lolling about on the steps. The gondolier tried to fish the bag up with his oar, but failing therein commenced a string of sentences to the traveller in the faith of his universal knowledge.

"What do you mean!" cried the agonized gentleman. Then turning to the loiterers he added, "Is there any body here who understands their infernal cackle?"

"Albergo dell'Europa," replied a man thrusting a card through the window at the end of a stick, as they do the Doring's lists going to Epsom. "Non ci sono nè pulci nè cimici in tutta la casa. Camere separate; e una buona tavola rotonda ben' imbandita. Ver good ouse, Signor."

"Yar!" screamed the traveller, as he dragged his carpet-bag, which an urchin recovered, in its dripping state, all over his fellow-passengers. "No! no!" he continued, shaking his head; "nothing. Je non pas; reang."

"Don't, G." observed a lady sitting near to him; "keep down your temper; it looks so vulgar."

"Pshaw!" replied Mr. Gudge; for such it was. "Will you look in that book you made me buy, and ask this man if he boards his lodgers."

"We were told at Milan to ask for the Polony something," said his partner. "Dear me—I quite forget the name, but it meant White Lion."

"The very reason I shan't go," said Mr. Gudge. "The innkeepers all play into one another's hands. I know 'em of old. Will you look in the book?"

The angry tones in which he put the question caused Mrs. Gudge, in a great tremor, to draw a book from her reticule, and begin hurriedly to turn over the leaves.

"Stop a minute," she said; "don't hurry and worrit me, or I shan't be able to do anything. Dear! dear! 'Vocabulary'—no—'Of things in a garden;' 'Of speaking to a washerwoman.' Stop, G. here it is. 'Of an hotel and things therein.' And then Mrs. Gudge read out "Geben sie zu essen?"

The hotel touter was entirely at a loss to understand what she said; so he touched his hat and shook his head.

"Give me the book," said Mr. Gudge snatching it from his wife. "Why you were reading the German. I told you before—the third column's the Italian. Look here. 'Datemi da mangiare?'"

"Si, Signor," said the touter. "Ver table d'hote good rosbif."

"Bif!" replied Mr. Gudge contemptuously. "Bif indeed! What's bif? Not that fried india rubber we've had ever since we started. Bif! pooh! Here, you Sir; I say. Spek Anglesh eh? Me no understand Italian—no make out, Mossoo."

Mr. Gudge fell into the popular error of believing that to make a foreigner understand you, you must talk broken English to him.

"The best way will be, my dear Sir, to go at once to a respectable hotel," said the other lady now speaking. "They will be sure to speak French there; and then I can explain all you want."

"I said so from the beginning," said Mrs. Gudge. "We should have had a currier."

"There is no necessity for that," replied the lady. "How fortunate it was that we met as we did at Boulogne. For it is so unpleasant to travel in a strange country. And as I said when you *are* posting, one extra in a carriage makes no difference. We shall do very well."

Mr. Gudge groaned inwardly; as he said to the lady,

"Mrs. Hamper—will you be good enough to tell these people where to go."

"Certainly—certainly," replied the other, as in a strange patois of bad French, distorted English, and a little conventional Italian, she gave some directions to the gondolier respecting their destination.

It may be satisfactory to account for Mrs. Hamper's presence in the travellers' party. Mr. and Mrs. Gudge, now on their grand tour, had met Mrs. Hamper, by mere chance, in a cheap Boulogne boarding-house, to which she was in the habit of repairing every autumn, living at a small outlay, winning trifling sums at round games in the evening, and playing the smuggler on her return, to such an extent—asking strange people to walk ashore in shawls and bonnets for her—lining her old cloaks with gloves, and distributing uncorked bottles of brandy amongst complying passengers to evade the duty,—that her visit altogether made no considerable addition to her income. Seeing how utterly ignorant the Gudges were of the simplest foreign words and customs, and hearing that they were going to travel, she immediately formed her plans; and knowing France well, made herself so exceedingly useful to them, that they had pressed her to accompany them to Paris, as their visitor. This was all she wanted. Once in the capital, the Gudges were children in her hands; and she played her cards most cleverly. She took them to an utterly French hotel, where they were compelled to rely upon her knowledge of the language for everything; talking them out of going to Lawson's, at the Hotel Bedford, where they could have spoken English to every body, from the obliging hostess herself to the under shoe-black—we ask his pardon, "*commissionnaire*." She saw about their passports, and by squabbling over trifling accounts, made them believe that she was saving a great deal of money for them; and finally, she got them to think that it would be perfect madness to go to Italy themselves; and that although she had promised her dear Lady Parlaware to stay with her at Cheltenham, and Sir Crindle Washey had invited her to his seat at Shummerer Castle, where there was to be a great party, yet she would throw all these engagements up for the sake of making the tour agreeable to her esteemed friends, the Gudges.

So it was agreed that she should go with them, only—it was so very unfortunate, and really placed her in such an unpleasant predicament—the comparatively small sum she had brought from England was nearly gone; and although M. Adam at Boulogne—a most agreeable person—would advance her all she might want, yet she was not acquainted with the Laffittes at Paris. Mr. Gudge, however, begged that this would not distress her; and accordingly, with the two servants, they all started together for Switzerland and the South; Mrs. Hamper kindly undertaking to pay all the bills on the road, settle all the expenses, and change all the money for them; "for," as she said, "the imposition practised upon English strangers is beyond all belief."

As long as they were in parts of the country that Mrs. Hamper was acquainted with, it was all very well, and to the Gudges she was certainly in a measure useful, as she knew all the show-places, and the cheapest way of visiting them—going every where but up the mountains, such as the Rigi and Montanvert, from the inability of Mrs. Gudge and herself to climb, and the impossibility of finding any mules sturdy enough to carry them. But in Italy she first became rather tiresome, being as great a stranger as the Gudges. And Mr. Gudge

not being a man of very refined taste, did not see much to amuse him in that country, but wandered about its cities and most famous spots, in the same spirit as one might have followed a friend over his grounds to see his turnips and plantations. The heat fidgetted them all by day, and the mosquitoes by night; and their man-servant, with Sarah, whom they had brought with them to make an effect, as they conceived, were still greater sources of worry from their utter helplessness. They would have had a courier had it not been for Mrs. Hamper's negating the proposal, since she did not wish the management of the expenses to go into other hands. And so they arrived at Venice.

The hotel decided upon, their water-coach moved on, along the grand canal, to its destination; its sleepy motion, and the quiet that reigned around, broken only by the cries of the gondoliers, as they approached the corners of the smaller thoroughfares, somewhat soothing Mr. Gudge's ruffled temper. He was not, however, seized very violently with the enthusiasm which it is proper to get up, on arriving at Venice.

"There don't appear much ground to let upon building leases," he observed, as he stared through the window at the densely-crowded houses; "and I shouldn't think it much of an investment if there was."

"Palazzo Byron, Signor," said the gondolier, looking in at the back of the conveyance, and pointing with his finger to the side of the canal. "Byron—Lor Byron."

"Oh, Lord Byron, is it?" replied Mrs. Gudge. "Dear me! I've heard of his name often, somewhere. Which is him?"

"The man means it is the palace he lived in when he was at Venice," said Mrs. Hamper. "Byron, you know, was a great poet, and that was his house."

"Oh—that was his house, eh?" said Mr. Gudge. "Looks damp; so they do all. One comfort though; no rats I should think, and water-rates next to nothing. Byron; let's see—ah—what did he write? Not very proper, was it, eh?"

"You must have read Childe Harold," said Mrs. Hamper.

"No, I can't say I have," replied Mr. Gudge. "I don't care much about children when they're not your own. So that was his house. What odd fancies those scribblers take into their heads. One might as well live in Ratcliffe Highway below high water mark, and get washed out of bed every high tide; or on a steamboat pier; or in the floating bath. Well, I don't think much of Venice yet."

"You haven't seen it, my dear Sir," said Mrs. Hamper, who having been instrumental in bringing them there, felt called upon to speak up for it. "Its associations are very interesting—the Bridge of Sighs, you know."

"Ah, now I recollect," replied Mr. Gudge. "I've seen it in plays and pictures—cocked up high over a ditch between two warehouses, and always moonlight. I didn't think it so wonderful, though. Pshaw! look at Barclay's Brewery if you want a bridge—eh!"

"But associations—"

"Ah! I can't say much about its associations, for I don't know anything of them. The Attorneys' Provident and Universal Annuity one is quite enough for me. I founded it. I shouldn't put much trust in foreigners. Hullo! here we are, I suppose. What's this? an hotel? Umph! it looks like a bit of old British Museum. Ah, yes—it's all right. You've caught us."

The last words were addressed to a knot of waiters and assistants generally, who were standing on the steps of the old palace-looking edifice that now served for the *Albergo dell' Europa*, as the gondola touched land.

"Buon giorno, Signore," said one of the persons, with a low bow, to Mr. Gudge, as he crept from the gondola.

"Now stop all your gibberish," replied the attorney. "It's all thrown away. Here—you Sir—any of you. Can't you hear? Send somebody who speaks English—English! Do you understand?"

An undeniable British tourist, in a shooting-jacket and Scotch cap, glazed boots and kid gloves, who was leaning against the portal, asked Mr. Gudge, in his own language, what he wanted.

"Thank goodness, here's somebody Christian," cried Mr. Gudge. "Thankee, Sir, I'm sure. We want a waiter who can understand us a little better than all these fools."

The tourist spoke to one of the attendants, who directly went into the hotel. As he departed, the rest began to unload the small barge that had brought them, to the indignation of the Gudge footman, but great satisfaction of Sarah, whose eyes had been rivetted by the magnificent appearance of the waiters ever since they stopped; and when the fiercest of them, whom she had almost put down for one of the Life Guards in plain clothes, shewed he was not at all proud, but dived under the canopy after Mr. Gudge's wet carpet-bag, she laughed outright, and cried, "Well, I never—if he isn't a Frenchman?" For in Frenchmen were all Sarah's notions of foreigners generally comprised.

Mrs. Gudge put on an expression of severity, as she looked at her servant, adding,

"Well, and suppose he is a Frenchman, it's not his fault, is it? Pray learn to conduct yourself properly."

Sarah coloured at the rebuke, which she felt lowered her in the eyes of the distinguished waiter; and then, being thus humbled, turned again to the footman, whom she was just beginning to think contemptibly of, by comparison.

Meanwhile, some one who spoke English had been found and was ushered down to the gondola. He was one of the attendants of the hotel—a youth about sixteen years old; and he came down the steps to receive the visitors' orders. But no sooner did Mr. Gudge see him than the eyes of that gentleman opened until they became small targets; his mouth extended itself in the same manner; and as he vainly sought for some relief from his embarrassment, with both hands in the lowest depths of his pocket, he leaned back against the canopy of the boat, and gasped:—



Galley, near the Rialto, at Venice

"Why, it never surely can be!"

On the other hand the youth was equally astonished, and had appeared to be deprived of speech, as soon as he perceived the travellers. So that for a few seconds they stood staring at each other; until Sarah whose powers of speech did not appear altogether to have deserted her; exclaimed:—

"Well! if that ain't Christopher, I never!"

"It is!" said Mr. Gudge, the spell of whose bewilderment was broken by the voice of the servant. "Eh? look here, young man. You're Christopher—Christopher Tadpole—ain't you? The one that was shipped at Southampton, and never heard of afterwards. Eh?"

"That's my name," said the youth.

"Why—we heard you were dead—long ago," continued Mr. Gudge, whilst his wife was staring in greater astonishment than her husband had done.

"Goodness gracious me!" said that lady, "I thought it was a ghost. It has given me quite a turn."

Wedge up as Mrs. Gudge was, with luggage and Mrs. Hamper, such a convulsion could only have been effected by the most powerful means; and the surprise was certainly violent enough; to judge from her face.

"There—get out the things," said Mr. Gudge suddenly, "or tell these people to. Well—this is pleasant," he continued to Mrs. Gudge and Mrs. Hamper collectively; "uncommon agreeable, to be sure. You'll want me to come to Venice again, I suppose. I was against it all along. But have your own way; oh! of course, have your own way. Hurry, and worry, and bait me into every species of tomfoolery, and then you'll be content. Yar!"

"Lord, Gudge; how was I to know?" said his partner, as with some difficulty she rose from her seat. "Don't go in that way making the journey uncomfortable. Im sure I'm topsy turvy myself."

"No you're not," said Gudge sharply. "Don't be a fool! catch hold."

And Mr. Gudge commenced handing the baggage out, pulling and banging all the boxes about as though they had been tiresome children, until the door of the Albergo dell' Europa was blockaded with trunks and carpet bags, to the exclusion of Sarah and the footman; who stood on the steps, staring about them in gaping confusion; looking upon the palaces as so many wharves; and wondering when they should get into the streets.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SKITTLER MEETS ONE OF CHRISTOPHER'S EARLY FRIENDS.

THERE are several shops in London now existing which have not altered in their physiognomies since we first recollect them, years and years ago. The same name is over the front, faint and tarnished with the suns and showers of many seasons; the same countenance, scarcely older or more lined than when we first knew it, peers from behind the counter; nay, in some instances there are the same, very same articles in the windows; now beyond all hope of sale, but still kept there, it is difficult to conceive wherefore.

If then, certain shops retain their original characteristics with such tenacity, it is not to be wondered at that the library in the court, where we left Sprouts in the position of assistant, should have altered but little. There were all the new periodicals, to be sure, and the latest "nuts to crack," very artistically displayed; but much of the old stock remained. A superstitious feeling had apparently permitted the snuff canisters and cigar boxes to repose untouched. The snuff in the canisters had long lost all its pungency, and might have been used for pepper with impunity; and the cigars lay in their mahogany sarcophagus in the undisturbed repose of mummy cheroots. And high up on a shelf the two brigands, dim and dusty, guarded some children's penny cricket balls, that were gaping like oysters in a hot room, or the unused hose of an engine in the dog-days. They had been there for years. It was impossible to say when they were new; or when the last purchaser—a boy then, but an old man now—had disturbed them.

And the name had changed. Mrs. Smedley's romance of life had come to an end after some sixty or seventy yearly parts: and she herself had at last been bound in boards. Some bright gold letters on, if possible, a brighter blue ground, told the folks of the court that it was "Sprouts's Library:" for Tom himself was now the master, having arrived at that proud position by the assistance of the jolly man, who had married Miss Twits, and never forgot his old friends. And opposite was a gay little window full of coquettish caps and buckram bonnet-shapes, with a real brass plate on the door, inscribed "Miss Payne, milliner and dress-maker;" and a ticket in the window, of the most elaborate letters, gold and scarlet and ultramarine so ingeniously fashioned that they could only be read with difficulty, told the curious student, after a little investigation that there, were "Ladies' own materials made up." The dolls fashionably dressed in tinted silver paper still smiled in the window; and offered an imposing contrast to some displayed in the next, which was the green-grocer's and shuttlecock-vender's. For they were devoid of symmetry, having been first fashioned by the turner, all round, like a queen nine-pin; and then had a bit sliced off to form their back, and their inferior extremity, for they

had but one, brought to a point. There had been, however, on the part of the original outfitter, an evident wish to throw a little style into their costume; for they had turbans of glazed chintz, in which some had plumes that looked as if they had tried to creep out of feather beds and been caught in the ticking: and some were rendered additionally smart by a bit of tinsel, fixed to their bosoms by a tin tack. But they all appeared hungry; their colours were faded; and the patch upon their cheeks betokened rather the hectic flush of starvation than the rosy hue of health. But Bessy Payne's dolls were models of fashion, and had jointed limbs, which usually gave them that appearance of admiration, supplication, or direction which only jointed dolls can assume.

Tom's fortune had not turned his head. He was not to be sure rolling in wealth, even now; but the people liked him, for he knew all about the books he sold, and could always give an opinion upon them, which he received from Bessy who always had, be certain, the first read of them for nothing. And he still kept up his friendship with Skittler; who paid him a visit occasionally, and smoked away all his old cigars, which he broke up and put in his pipe. And when we again meet them, Skittler was sitting in Tom's back parlour, after the shop was shut up, before the fire, which had not long been lighted to cheer the Spring evening, as it was rather chilly.

Sprouts and his friend were fully employed; and their occupation, by the light of an end of candle, stuck in the broken neck of an image of Napoleon, was somewhat odd. Skittler had a bit of wood in his hand, rudely cut into the profile of a head and body, with the addition of a cocked hat; and from this he was splitting veneers in the straight grain, reproducing, in great quantities, likenesses of the distinguished lady or gentleman—for the sex was not altogether very plain—that it was intended to represent. The stamp of individuality was left to Sprouts to set upon them, who adorned these thin profiles according to his fancy, furnishing them also with legs and arms, of which a considerable quantity lay by his side. And when this was done, they were arranged to dry round the fire-place, previous to being fitted up with some artful arrangement of string, which not only jointed them, but, on being pulled, threw their limbs into violent convulsions, and caused their knees and elbows to assume painful, not to say unnatural, attitudes. The fire-place had a comical appearance with its occupants; some of whom looked irresistibly absurd as they leaned back against the fender, inside, and appeared to be drying at their ease.

"There! that's the last," said Tom, as he tried the joints of one of the Scaramouches. "Not a bad 'un either. Very like Bonyparte only I never see him. He ought to go, to-morrow."

And he admiringly tugged the figure into performing an undignified dance, not altogether in keeping with the popularly-received notions of Napoleon's character.

"Something ought to sell," replied Skittler; "if people like us is to live, Tom. Trade in the streets is worse and worse; and they long barrows of things cuts up the regular business. There'll be hundreds

denly out ; and the court was wrapt in silence for the rest of the night, disturbed only by the tread of the policeman.

But it was all alive again when the morning sunbeams came down to the third floors of the houses that surrounded it—for they never got any lower. Tom was up with it, and when he emerged from the front door to take down the shutters, he was so smart that the milkwoman stopped in awe to look at him, and the dealer in door-mats respectfully asked if he wanted any, instead of merely announcing his arrival with his usual independent shout. There was no string, no sealing-wax, no black-reviver now, to be discovered in his toilet ; he looked as smart, and spick and span new, as if he had been one of the fashionable figures at the doors of tailors' shops, suddenly animated. Presently arrived one of his acquaintances, whom Tom directly took into the library, pointing out to him whereabouts different things were kept and giving him many directions : from which it was evident that Tom was going out for a holiday, and had got somebody to take his place.

The holiday was Greenwich Fair, whither he was to accompany Mr. and Mrs. Chirpey, and Bessy Payne ; and when the little party had assembled in the little shop it would have been difficult to have found four happier faces, and certainly one prettier, in all London. For the jolly man was still the same—a trifle stouter, perhaps, but that was of little consequence—and his partner had forgotten all her first affections ; and finding that hearts were not daily crushed and blighted as she had once imagined, was as cheerful as her husband ; indeed in the lively good-humoured Mrs. Chirpey, you would have scarcely recognised the romantic soul-wearied Miss Twits. She had given up reading the penny romances ; for two small publications of her own—one four years old, and the other but a few months—took up all her attention. And the youngest of these accompanied the party, Mrs. Chirpey insisting upon carrying it herself : "Because," as she said, "she knew what the steamers were, and that babies always went to Battersea or Gravesend by mistake, if their mothers once let them go out of their hands. And Bessy looked so cruelly pretty—had grown such a trim plump little woman, and was so elegantly dressed, that Sprouts quite misgave his power over her affections, almost thinking that she was too good for him. But this feeling did not last long ; for Bessy hung to his arm so comfortably and began to talk and laugh so good-naturedly—to Mr. Chirpey, and Letty, and to Tom more than any body—offering to carry the baby too ("for practice," as the jolly man observed, which improper remark produced the greatest confusion, and was indeed too bad) that Tom was soon re-assured. And so they set forth, the envy and admiration of the entire court ; and proceeded towards the river.

They had to wait a little while at Hungerford Pier, for there was scarcely standing-room on the packet that was to start first. Tom bought some periwinkles on the sly, "to amuse himself going down," he said, which made Bessy pout, and regret that he felt so dull, at which Tom wanted to be affectionate, but was very properly reproved. In a few minutes a boat came up, and the dangerous process of embarking Mrs. Chirpey and baby having been accomplished, the others

followed, and the vessel moved off, rolling under its heavy freight until the water almost washed in at the cabin windows. The folks were so wedged together, that Sprouts could not produce the effect he had intended, with a bottle of stout and a biscuit; and the harp and cornet had as much as they could do to get room to move their arms. But this, as Tom said, was an advantage, because it was perfectly impossible for them to come round for money when they had finished playing.

At last, after stopping everywhere to take in more people, until the passengers swarmed like bees on every available part of the boat, and Mrs. Chirpey laboured under a constant hallucination that they were continually going to the bottom, and that the captain knew it but would not tell them, and begged the jolly man to save their child, but let her perish, when the boiler burst, which she was sure it was going to do,—they got to Greenwich, and made their way towards the Park. They fought a hard battle though to get there. For at first the touters appeared to insist on their returning to town immediately in four boats that were snorting and screaming alongside, as their partisans increased the riot by the exercise of large bells, with which they rang the scared senses of wavering passengers into utter idiotcy, until they were carried unresistingly on board any boat that the pirates thought proper to select. Then a smart skirmish took place with the tea-room proprietors, who regarded shrimps as the staff of life, and baited whole rows of windows with them, to catch those strangers whom they could not harpoon and tow off at once. And finally, they had the severest struggle of all with the rows of cheap refreshment stalls that bordered the thoroughfare, on which every thing in nature, organic or otherwise, appeared to have been converted into something to eat. The last of these was the Taglioni cart of Skittler, brilliant with new paint, and covered with attractive wares, including the manufactures of the preceding evening; the scaramouches and feathered cocks and hens, whose limbs dangled and plumes blew about in the wind; and also small ferocious infernal machines, calculated to startle people with the notion that their coat was torn when hurried down their backs, in which “the whole fun of the fair” was dated to be comprised, “for a penny,” an assertion either placing the day’s amusement at a very low rate, or the powers of condensation at a proportionately high one. But the majority of Skittler’s wares had been fashioned on unkind principles. There were gallons of detonating balls to explode at the feet of old ladies, and grosses of Waterloo crackers to pull at the ears of elderly gentlemen; horrid things, too, to put under chairs, and go off with terrific bangs when any one sat down after a too pressing invitation; demoniacal globules, like glass tadpoles, that blew candles out at any given period. The only eatables he vended partook of this unkind spirit; they were small gingerbread buttons, which the consumers did not discover were made of cayenne pepper until he had swallowed them. But Skittler had studied human nature deeply, in his rough way. He knew how much readier people always are to give pain than to alleviate it—how much easier is the process—and he practised successfully on his knowledge accordingly.

"Now then, here we is!" he cried, as he recognized Sprouts and his friends, with a sideways masonic wink. "Here's the lucky bag of gold and silver, that was made ten miles underground by a man who never came up but once a year to see what o'clock it was, and then died and took the patent along with him wherever he went to. This is the only lucky-bag in the fair where there is all prizes and no blanks. A ha'penny is all we ask. Here you are, Sir!"

But the gentleman addressed, thus suddenly attacked and made the object of attention, retreated amongst the crowd.

"Don't be afraid, Sir," continued Skittler, shaking up something that looked like a worn-out fur cap. "Faint heart never won a fair lady. As I say so I do; and this is the mint, the mine, the ringing mountain and the springing fountain of all the wealth of the world, and eversomuch besides. Be in time! be in time! You know the greatest of your losses, but you cannot tell the greatest of your gains. Here's the Lord High Chancellor of England waiting to have a chance, and that's the Queen upon his arm, who's come out here for a little relaxation, but I havn't time to attend to them at present. You spoke first, my noble captain."

And he touched his hat with much respect to Sprouts, and held the bag towards him.

"Oh, Tom!" whispered Bessy, "I never! I'm sure they take you for a captain. You must have a chance. I have got a halfpenny."

"So have I," replied Tom, thinking his funds insulted. "There, my good man; now give us a good one," and he spoke to Skittler with a patronizing air, partly wishing to appear to encourage him, partly conceiving that he might be really taken for a noble captain.

The bag was shaken up, and Tom drew a chance therefrom, the nature of which he had no small difficulty in decyphering, for Skittler's amanuensis rejoiced in that kind of writing which usually precedes six lessons according to the popular notion. But at last, he observed, with evident mistrust of his decyphering powers:

"It's—it's a warming-pan."

"A warming-pan," said Skittler; "no, I think not. Let me look, my gallant admiral."

He changed Sprout's rank in the service out of compliment to a sailor who came up at the moment with his sweetheart.

"A warming-pan—no—that's a wedding-ring. Just the same thing; that is to say it leads to one. There's a beautiful gold wedding-ring, with no end to it, that the officer has got for a ha'penny; and there's the beautiful young lady that's a going to wear it. Who's the next lucky customer?"

Bessy now found that her pretty face was the object of attraction instead of Sprouts; so she drew him away, only leaving Tom time to tell Skittler they'd see him again bye-and-bye; and they entered the Park. But Mr. Chirpey was not one to let a joke die; as he poked Sprouts with his stick, and kept repeating it to "the missus," as he would term her, and Bessy, all the way to the top of one tree hill, where they sat down awhile on the springing glistening turf, in the sunlight

and the pure air. It was a busy day with the old pensioners. All the telescopes, and magnified beetles, and coloured spy-glasses, were in full employment; and the owners of the former were shewing their customers every thing they wanted to look at, no matter how far off or invisible it was. Bessy wanted to see the shops in their court; but the view was not satisfactory. There was the tall chimney, however, she was sure, whose smoke always came into her room with the easterly winds; that was something; and she could swear to Bedlam. How nice to see Bedlam, and be at Greenwich all the while!

There was really too much to be amused at—leave alone the bright blue sparkling river and the waving trees—the colliers trooping out so gravely down the tide, and the large foreign steamers, whose course you could trace for miles until they appeared to have got all amongst the fields and farm-houses in the distance. From the town came the swarming sound of life—the distant faint confusion of drums and bells, and other fearful engines of cunning exhibitors—clever people who knew the good effect of noise, however made, in increasing popularity. The slopes, too, rang with the screams and laughter of the daring enthusiasts who would run down the hill after the oranges, which, however, chiefly fell into the hands of the less ardent spirits who waited below rather than the ambitious ones who only climbed to fall; and everywhere was sunshine and merriment. Indeed it would have done anybody's heart good, whose sympathies were not quite blunted by the constant knocks and chafings of the rude world, to have seen the thousands of happy individuals who broke out from their confined dwellings in the close crowded metropolis for the free space and healthy atmosphere of Greenwich Park. The smoke of London appeared to know that it had no business there, for it hung on the horizon in a compact dark smokey cloud, evidently forbidden to advance in the least degree.

The jolly man had a wicked plan in his head, and he let Sprouts into the secret. They very slyly got a handkerchief, and each laying hold of one end, stretched it out behind Bessy Payne, and fairly entrapped her; and then they started away down hill, pulling the little milliner with them, in this simple harness, and never allowing her to stop until she arrived, panting and blushing and breathless, at the bottom; all her "now, Toms!" and "Oh, do stops!" having been brutally disregarded. It was fortunate that she did not fall, for many of the young ladies did; and then it was so awkward, Bessy really didn't know how they could come up the hill again after it! The boys, however, who scrambled after the oranges were apparently perfectly insensible to anything like concussions or contusions. They jostled all together on the slope, and sometimes five or six fell one over another in their violent impetus to catch the fruit that bounded past them like a cricket-ball. But they did not seem to care about these accidents. They rolled over and over as if they had been made of Indian rubber, and the next moment were upon their legs again as active as ever. It took Mr. Chirpey a much longer time to get up the hill than it did to go down; and when he reached the tree, which, from its bare appearance, looked

as if it grew with its roots in the air,—his face was as red as a boiled lobster, but still very jolly. And then Mrs. Chirpey told him that baby had been really wonderful whilst he had been away, and that she had never seen such observation for seven months; for it had laughed at their running down the hill, and crowed and jumped so in her arms, that Mrs. Chirpey was sure it wanted to be off after them. And then she begged Mr. Chirpey and Sprouts, and Bessy in particular, would look how well it was beginning to walk. This performance was, however, a feeble one; inasmuch as being held to the ground, it betrayed great disinclination to touch it, with the two little red worsted halfpence-jugs, which Mrs. Chirpey believed to be shoes, catching up its inferior extremities, as nursery kittens do when taught to walk unnaturally by juvenile professors.

Their next pitch was Blackheath. Of course the donkeys offered too great a temptation to be refused; and Bessy and Tom were soon scampering over the heath as fast as three boys behind each animal could hurry them on. The progress of Sprouts was most extraordinary. His length of legs was such, that both touched the ground, so that although he appeared to be mounted he was in reality running as fast as the donkey. However, it all made fun; and when so much was to be got for sixpence, it was astonishing what uncomfortable lives people led to collect fortunes, just by the time they were of no use. For perhaps after all it is a question whether happiness is not fun in a quiescent state.

Mr. and Mrs. Chirpey did not ride: the jolly man mistrusted his weight, and his partner would not venture with baby. So they sat on some timber, and watched their companions; and when the ride was over insisted that Sprouts should have his fortune told, as a swarthy bead-eyed gipsy approached them. Upon which they both consented; and heard so much about presents, and journeys, and dark gentlemen and pieces of silver, that it was very evident an important period in their lives was arriving.

The day went brightly on; and at last they agreed to return into the fair and see some of the wonders. For there were some very extraordinary sights after you had carried the Thermopylæ of the gingerbread booths by storm and got amongst the shows. And when they had gone through all of them—Mr. Chirpey insisting upon paying—when they had seen the wax-work of accommodating figures who did duty for every fresh celebrity who started up; and the thin panting tigers in their hot dusty dens, amongst which the keeper went in a tattered Roman tunic over his corduroy trousers and made them jump sluggishly through hoops:—when they had wondered at the foreign noblemen outside Richardson's show, and laughed at the fat man who played the ophyclidean in a striped Egyptian dress and spectacles; and pronounced the young lady in the black velvet body, short skirt and ochred legs to be "a pretty dancer" after she had finished her fling outside—after all this and a great deal more proclaimed from the platforms: "The fair Circassian!" "The banded Armadillo!" the bells rung, and gongs beaten and pistols fired; "The Annacondy or gr-r-reat sea-serpent from Americay!" "There is no deception: they are all alive! a pennee—a

pennec is all we ask!" the arm of the dwarf, the leg of the fat lady, and the hair of the white negress shown outside for nothing to entice customers: "Enquire the nature of the exhibition from the company now leaving the caravan:"—amidst and after all this, Mr. Chirpey proposed some refreshment.

The canvass portals of the Crown and Anchor booth stood invitingly open, showing such a mighty bar,—such mountains of cold beef; and bottled oceans of stout, and groves of crisp cold lettuces,—such preparations against famine, in fact, for all England during a twelvemonth, that they entered at once; and soon fell to upon these viands with an appetite that the rarest *carte* at the neighbouring Trafalgar or Brunswick tavern had never provoked.

"Why, there's Skittler again!" said Tom, as he recognised his friend, who was dining at an adjoining table with a little square dirty man in a worn out military coat. "How came you here?"

"Oh—it's all right," replied the other as he took up some salad dressing with his knife; which made Bessy wince again. "My pardner's got the stall for the next turn. We're doing capital to-day you know: only I've found a old friend."

"Oh—indeed," said Tom, looking at the companion.

"Aye; and something curious too at the same time," Skittler continued. "You couldn't step over here a minute, could you? Saving your presence, Miss," he added to Bessy, as her features expressed a doubt of Tom's incapacity to do so, as plainly as eyes could talk.

"I will not be a minute, Bessy," Sprouts whispered. "Perhaps he's got something of consequence to tell me."

"Oh—pray take your time, Sir," answered the little girl. "I don't mind I'm sure; if you never come back again."

Tom gave Bessy's plump arm a quiet squeeze; and then joined the others at their table.

"I met this old gent quite by chance," said Skittler, "and haven't seen him for ever-so-long. Hickory; perhaps you'll drink with my friend Mr. Sprouts."

The introduction was accordingly accomplished.

"We was a long time in the north together," said Skittler, "'till I come to town to pick up some of the gold; and now he's doing the same. He sings out and out, you know."

"Have you got on well to-day?" asked Tom, impressed with great respect for Skittler's friend, as soon as he learned that he was a professional.

"Oh—I mustn't grumble," said the other; "I don't suppose it rains ha'pence here any more than it does in the north; but I've had a few flying showers. They like the girl's dancing; and if I could get her to any of the theaytres we should do capital."

"There's great stuff in her," observed Skittler; "you'll see her, Tom, by and bye. Lor! I knew her poor father well enough. He never looked as if he'd live though; always seemed to want winding up every five minutes. How long's Luddy been dead, old man?"

"Three year come May fair," was the reply. "Died quite quiet: went off just like a squib at last."

The only scene that presented itself to Sprouts, was dying with a bang, which did not seem a very tranquil departure.

"I mean," said Hickory, "his touch-paper had been a long time lighted; and we knew he must go, sooner or later: and so it was, when it come, all in a hurry, at Northwich fair. 'Hick'ry,' says he, 'the performance is over; but I tell you what I should like to do:—just to play that old tune when the skeleton used to come up in the fanty-seeny before he tumbled to bits. Where's the pipes?' Now you see the curious thing was we hadn't worked them dolls—no, not for years."

"I've knowed that happen though," said Skittler gravely: "often and often. It's the regular business to do."

"Well," continued Hickory, "we gave him the pipes and he began to play 'Home, sweet, home,' quite slow, as he used. And when he came to the part where the skeleton fell to pieces, down he went, all of a heap, just as the doll did; and never spoke again. Played himself out, regularly."

And here Hickory drank, as it were, to the memory of his old associate; and for a minute was silent.

"But about business," said Skittler, turning to Sprouts. "Don't you recollect, Tom, the affair I had about a boy, with your old governor Gudge—he I went the wild goose chase after, to Southampton, and missed him?"

"All right," said Sprouts, winking, to imply intelligence.

"Well now—it's very odd: but I found out quite by chance from Hickory, that he knew the boy too: didn't we?"

"What? Christopheros!" said Hickory. "Why, he travelled with us, until they got him back to Liverpool. There's a good deal hangs upon him, depend upon it; or they wouldn't have been so anxious about his being taken away."

"Now, I know old Gudge, pretty well," said Skittler to Sprouts; "and so do you; you ought to. What's he up to?"

"Off abroad, since he came into all that money. I don't know how, though. He never went into mourning, so it don't look as if any body had died. But if they had, that wouldn't have made much difference; unless he'd a black coat in wear, and an old hat that wanted a bit of crape to make it look smart."

"Tom!" said Bessy's voice, from the other table.

"Directly," replied Sprouts. But thinking that he might have answered in too off-hand a manner, he got up and ran over to the little girl, saying hurriedly,

"Half a minute, Bessy. I think we've found out something clever. You shall know all about it, by and bye."

And then he returned to his seat.

"Well now; what I have to say is this," said Skittler; "I'd almost forgotten all about it; but from what I've heard," and he dropped his voice, "I think it will pay us to keep an eye upon Gudge and his

movements. You may depend upon it he's doing things he's no right to."

"More than what I've said," added Hickory; "I know an old gent in the country, who could tell something still, if he chose. I ain't quite sure whether he didn't bring the child into the world."

"I should like to be down upon him," said Sprouts, squeezing the handle of a knife very hard, as though it was Gudge embodied. "He got too much out of me for nothing. I can see it now: I'll keep awake." And then breaking off, he added, nodding, "I say, who's this?"

Whilst he had been speaking, a little party of two or three persons had entered the booth, and come up to the table, where Skittler and his friends were sitting. The party consisted of an elderly woman, a man with a drum and pandean pipes, and a young girl. But the latter was so exceedingly beautiful; and at once so perfectly riveted the gaze of those looking at them, that the others passed unnoticed. She was about fourteen or fifteen years old; but her face had an expression of thought beyond those years. She was dressed in a tawdry spangled skirt, and a much-worn black velvet body; and a quantity of heavy curling chesnut hair was confined to her head by a piece of silver twist. But her figure was most exquisite; and in her scanty dress, its extreme symmetry could be plainly seen. Her shoes were worn, but they could not conceal the smallness of her foot; and her taper fingers ran lightly over the skin of a tambourine as she entered the booth, and turned her large dark liquid eyes towards the party. She was calculated to have given persons a notion that there might once have been an Esmeralda.

"Well, Patsy, what have you been doing?" asked Hickory.

"Very well, uncle," she replied, as she turned round to the woman who accompanied her, and took a roll of half-pence, tied up in a pocket-handkerchief from her. "All this from the Park—nearly eighteen-pence. And here," she added, with triumph, "is sixpence besides, which a gentleman gave me all at once when I took the stilts off."

"That's a brave girl!" said Hickory; "and now have some dinner."

"No; I'm not hungry, uncle! I can't eat anything," replied the girl, as with a sudden sigh, that told more of despondency than bodily fatigue, she sat down on the end of the form.

"Why what's the matter, Patsy?" said Hickory; "not eat!—Pshaw! How will you ever grow to be a handsome woman if you don't. What's the matter? Are you tired?"

"Yes, uncle; very."

"Of dancing? Well you shan't go out any more to-day."

"No—not altogether of dancing; but I should like to learn something better. There is a girl outside the great show who dances so beautifully; and when we tried to make a pitch there, it was no use. The people would not look at me whilst she was on the platform. She was up away from the crowd too; and they couldn't make fun of her; at least, if they did she couldn't hear it."

"Well, don't let that worrit you," said Hickory; "we're getting

close to London now, you know—great London, that you've so long wanted to see. And there you shall learn ; and, perhaps, one of these days be on the platform of a great show, yourself, and earn half-a-guinea every day of the fair—who knows ! There, come, sit down."

"I should say, Tom," said Skittler, "we rayther know the man who could teach little Miss, eh?"

"Monsieur Fandango?"

"To be sure. Uncommon clever he is too: tie all his pupils' legs into such knots, and so quickly, he can, that their feet quite wink again when they're dancing. I recollect 'em, you know."

Sprouts was about to corroborate the fact, when Bessy came behind him, "to wish him good bye," as she said, "because they were all going ; and hoped he'd have a pleasant evening." And then the little milliner looked almost cross—she never could quite—at the dancing-girl, whom Tom had been regarding with great awe.

This was quite enough to make Tom start up as though he had sat upon a tin tack turned up, or anything else uncomfortable. So he made a hurried salute to the party, telling Skittler they would meet to talk about everything at the first opportunity, and leaving them at the table altogether.

Bessy Payne kept up the prettiest affectation in the world, of being angry, for at least five minutes after they left the booth. But when they got into the Park again, and made two of an unlimited game of Kiss in the Ring that was going on, her good humour gradually returned. Not too suddenly, though—not a bit of it ; indeed, she could not be said to have left off calling Tom "Sir;" and always finding something interesting to look at in another direction, when he spoke to her, until a pound of the best spice nuts, not to mention some casual oranges, and a small goblet of curds and whey, had quite dispelled every trace of a pout.

And then all was again unalloyed happiness. They lingered long about the Park, until the mists came up from the river ; and the trees about the Observatory caught the last rays of the sun, as he went down, red and dusty, behind London ; and a thousand lights began to twinkle, here and there from the stalls, coming out with the stars that one after another shewed themselves in the rosy heavens. And then Mrs. Chirpey thought it time to go home ; as those nasty steamers were sure to run over one another if they waited till dusk ; or if they didn't do that, they blew up so. So they made their way down to the pier, Tom insisting upon carrying Baby, who was now fast asleep, having made a light, but satisfactory supper off its own thumbs ; and whom Sprouts held with the same awkward affection that Mr. Punch evinces in nursing the only-born of his establishment, before conjugal bickerings induce him to throw it out of window.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR. GUDGE HAS AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHER.

As soon as the luggage had been carried to the different rooms allotted to the Gudge party, and Sarah and the footman having been each shewn into a chamber at the top of the house, were fixed there for the day, being in a measure afraid of venturing out by themselves, and not knowing how to ask their way—Mr. Gudge recommended his better-half to go out on the balcony and see the view, and then sent for Christopher, who had been as surprised as the other at the strange meeting, and whose misgivings therefrom arising, were equally uncomfortable, although they were of a different kind.

"So you're here—are you?" said Mr. Gudge, as the youth came into the room. "And what are you doing; eh? well? you young scamp?"

"It's not been my fault if I am one; but I hope you are wrong, there," said Christopher, not caring much for the other's rough address; feeling that Mr. Gudge at Coke Villa, was of much greater importance than Mr. Gudge in an hotel at Venice; especially when the difference in his own age was added to it.

"And you don't feel inclined to come back to England then, do you?" asked Gudge. "You're settled here—fixed—comfortable, for good—eh?"

"I don't know that," said Christopher; pleased, at the same time, to find that Gudge had evidently no absolute command over him, by his way of speaking. "My only motive for coming back again would be to find out who I am, unless you like to tell me. For I suppose you know."

"I know nothing," said Gudge.

"Well—then. Sir Frederick Arden does."

"Sir Frederick Arden—at least the one you mean—knows a great deal more than either of us, now. You recollect the night you went away with him. Well; he was drowned; boxed up in his carriage like a mouse in a trap, at Weybridge Lock. So there's not much to be learned from him. You'd better keep where you are."

"I shall find out," said Christopher. "I've made up my mind to do so ever since I saw the pains that were taken to get me out of the way, the night I left your chambers. It was very miserable at the time; but I am sure it will turn out well one of these days."

"Tell me," continued Gudge, "how was it managed? You need not be afraid. I've no power over you now—d'ye see that, eh?"

"Afraid!" returned Christopher, in a tone of contempt. "You must not think me the same as when I was with you. I am afraid of nobody at present."

"You're a sharp dog," said Gudge.

"You're a sharper," retorted Christopher. He had not meant to

give a double meaning to his word, but it made Mr. Gudge cough unsatisfactorily, and then strive to hide his annoyance by speaking immediately :

"But what became of you? Whatever was done it was well managed. I sent after you, as you had left my service without warning; and I got a smart fellow, too, to track you; but it was no go."

As Gudge looked at Christopher, he was astonished at the difference so comparatively short a period had made in him. The small meek child had grown almost to a young man, who even dared to exhibit no terror at his presence, but appeared perfectly prepared to answer him in his own fashion. And seeing that his appearance had not impressed the boy with any of those feelings of frightened respect which he formerly exhibited, he changed his tone, and repeated :

"But it was no go. What became of you, then, Christopher?"

"I was taken to Southampton," replied the other; "and shipped the next day from there to Marseilles, under care of the captain. I cannot recollect it very clearly. Every thing was so hurried; and I was so tossed about from one hand to the other, that when I got to land I hardly knew who was my master. There was, however, somebody who paid for me all the time, until I went on to Leghorn. And then I was put in an hotel there, and had no more charge taken of me."

"And how long were you there?"

"Oh! two years and more. I fancied one day, when I was waiting at the table-d'hôte, I heard some of the company talking of Sir Frederick Arden's death; but I was called away to the other end, and could not catch the finish. I have thought a great deal about him though, since then, and what made him take me away."

"And then," said Gudge, not caring to sympathize with Christopher's speculations on this point; "and then, you came on here?"

"I was engaged by an English family to travel with them. They were going on to Trieste and Constantinople, and stopped at this hotel, on their way, where the lady of the party was taken ill and died. The husband remained here a little time, and then returned home; and as the master of our house found that the English travellers who came here were always in want of a waiter who could understand them, I remained, and here I have been ever since."

"And here I would advise you to stop, my man," said Mr. Gudge, kindly, turning quite patronizing on a sudden. "Who knows but that some day the house may be your own. Indeed I never knew a head-waiter—and I call you a head-waiter because, you see, you stand here quite alone by yourself—I say, I never knew a head-waiter who did not one day step into his master's shoes. And I never knew a master that hadn't been a head-waiter. You stay."

And he pronounced the two last words with impressive emphasis.

"I'm not sure of that," answered Christopher. "I want to be satisfied as to what I ought to be. I recollect enough of you to know that you'll never tell me; but I'm sure I'm somebody; and if ever I find I am, I mean to let others know it, I can tell you."

And Christopher, with no fear of Gudge before his eyes, looked out

of the window, and even hammed a tune, with an absence of all respect that to the lawyer was perfectly frightful. He was silent for a moment, and then he said :

"But shouldn't you like to stay here now? You must have formed many nice connections—made many valuable friends, that in your position in England you could never have had a chance of doing."

"Not in what my position was," said Christopher, "but in what it may be, I may better all my friends. You will find me again in London before long. I had almost forgotten it, but seeing you has put all the plans again into my head, that have at times made me quite giddy with thinking over them. I shall find out what I am yet."

There was an easy confidence in his manner, which to Gudge was almost bewildering, and he half regretted having brought about the conversation. Fortunately for his embarrassment, however, Mrs. Gudge, who had "looked at the city," as her husband had recommended, quite long enough for her own gratification, came back into the room, and Christopher took his departure.

"Well, of all the curious things, meeting with that boy!" observed the lady, as she entered. "G., it seems like providence that what you have so long kept a secret from me, should be cast up from the deep wherever you go. But your own heart will be your punishment."

Mrs. Gudge did not exactly know what for: beyond the heinous crime that her husband evidently knew something which she did not. She said this, as similar speeches are often made, to provoke a confession in the shape of an excuse. But Mr. Gudge was proof.

"Pshaw!" he merely said; "don't talk trash. What nonsense you get into your head."

"Nonsense—no, G.; it's no nonsense. I'm not one to shear a bruised deer I'm sure, but if you had any secrets before you married, you might have told me. There was no occasion for me to have confessed to you that I was engaged for two years to a dispensing chemist, who had another window for fancy stationary, and lived at Brighton; but I felt it my duty as a wife to assure you that the ties had been broken."

"Yes," said Gudge, with severity; "because he broke himself, and went off in the night on a spring van. Now mind me; not another word upon the subject; or I go back to England to-morrow."

"And go back I wish you would," said Mrs. Gudge; "for nothing but mortification has been the case since I've been abroad. And then to-day you told me it was my doing—in the face of that woman. Oh G., G.; for shame—for shame!"

And here Mrs. Gudge strove very hard, by looking at the sun, and winking her eyelids forcibly together, to produce a tear, but without effect. So she turned from the pathetic to the contemptuous.

"And this is Venus," she said, looking down across the canal to the Dogana—the *coup d'œil* which has been so frequently represented on transfer fire-screens, papier-maché letter-cases and perforated album cards. "And this is Venus that we've travelled night and day to see, choked by the hot dust when we were on the road, and eaten up by

the musketeers when we were in bed. Well—if you must have a place that's neither sea nor river, for my part give me Gravesend; where you are within one hour and ninepence. Venus indeed; paugh!"

"Well," said Mr. Gudge; "it wasn't my doing, and you say it wasn't yours. I never wanted to see the place; and never should have done if your friend there hadn't talked me into it. I expect to die of rheumatism as it is, from the mere look of it, before I leave. Where they'll bury one in such a swamp I'm sure I can't pretend to say."

"Well—you know who it is—Mrs. Hamper I *think* has had something to do with it. Seven years has that woman owed me seven and sixpence; and half-a-crown for the tongue when we had the dinner. I wish we had never met her."

"Ah! now you are rational," said Mr. Gudge, quite complaisantly, delighted to find that the train of his wife's thoughts had gone upon another line. "Tootsy, we must get rid of her politely."

"It's not to be done, G.," replied his wife; "she's a leech."

"Isn't it?" said her husband. "We'll see. Hark! there's the dinner bell. Leave it all to me."

And they prepared to enter the *salle-à-manger*, in which the different residents of the hotel were assembled.

There was the usual circle at table, that you always meet at the chief haunts of the migratory classes: newly arrived English talking about what they had seen, and literally overdoing the conventional enthusiasm which people on their travels work up at every fresh show place, and Venice especially; strange looking foreigners who regularly boarded in the house, and were seen there, year after year, in the same place, with the same ring for their napkin and label for their wine; gaining their livelihood, nobody knew how, or where. Capitally made-up women, also; who loved rouge and broad plaits, and were always ready to play *écarté* in the evening; and humble *employés* of different offices who sat at the bottom of the table, and never spoke to any body.

It was a strange fatality in Mrs. Hamper's existence, that she never went any where without meeting somebody she knew, or, at all events, acquaintances of somebody she knew; and, accordingly, she had not been seated at table two minutes, before she found that her *vis-à-vis* was some marriage-connection of Lady Palawar's, who, with his bride, was going on to Florence. So, to the indignation of the Gudges, she directly turned all her attention to her new friends, leaving the others to flounder through the shoals of a *table-d'hôte* as they best could.

"Ice!" said Mr. Gudge, with some surprise, as some glass saucers-full were placed on the table. "Now, I wonder where the devil they get that from. Sea water don't freeze, especially in August."

"It comes from the mountains," said a tourist.

"So it does, sure," said Mrs. Gudge; "we saw it in Switzerland. Didn't we, Mrs. Hamper?"

"Oh, yes—beautiful!" said that lady, with an expression of admiration, directly continuing her talk with the new acquaintances.

Mrs. Gudge looked glaciers at her, and then continued:

"How singular it is that the ice is thicker up the mountains, the nearer you get to the sun."

"Uncommon," said her husband.

"It's a mere question of radiation," said the tourist, forcing the crumbs into battalions on the cloth with the handle of his knife.

"Ah, ah! very true," observed Mr. Gudge; but whether the question related to taxes or artificial freezing, he had not the least idea.

Other guests now began to talk of what they had been to see that day. Mrs. Hamper continued her attentions to Lady Parlawar's connections; evidently wishing to drop the Gudges; who, feeling themselves snubbed, began to talk at her. But it had no effect; at which Mr. Gudge got so indignant, that, already raised to the proper degree of determination, he resolved to bring the affair to a crisis. And, accordingly, when the ladies rose, he followed Mrs. Hamper, and told her that a most annoying circumstance had happened;—that he had found, upon the commissioner's presenting his letter of credit at the bank, an unfortunate error had rendered it of no more value than so much waste paper; and thus, consequently, he was placed in a very awkward position for want of money. Could she lend him twenty pounds?

As he had expected, Mrs. Hamper had nothing of the kind of sum about her; upon which, he continued, that he must put her to the unpleasant necessity of allowing them to get back to Paris as fast as they could alone, as in such a position every shilling was an object; indeed, that he had some thought of having his footman and Sarah married at the embassy before they started, to decrease the hotel expenditure. And, moreover, he should not have mentioned this subject, but he saw she had met some friends. And he said this last rather spitefully.

Poor Mrs. Hamper! She would not for worlds have Mrs. Gudge to think that she was not on terms of the greatest intimacy with any of Lady Parlawar's connections; so, aware that they were going to Florence, and feeling, from certain broad hints from time to time dropped on the road, that the Gudges were beginning to get wearied of their tour, she at once made up her mind what course to pursue. She begged she might not interfere with them—was extremely sorry for their embarrassment—and would not encumber them with her company any more; but would start the next morning for Florence, to which place she had received an invitation from her dear friends.

So far all was satisfactory to Mr. Gudge; and hearing that some people were going to Bologna by post—for the diligences were not to be depended on—he lost no time in informing Mrs. Hamper of it. She agreed to accompany them, anxious to get to Florence before her new friends, that she might fasten on them the more readily when they arrived. So leaving the Gudges at the hotel, we will now follow her fortunes: passing over a monotonous journey from Venice to the point of their destination, where Mrs. Hamper engaged with a return *vetturino* to take her across the Apennines at a marvellously small rate of payment; having packed a raised pie and some Bologna sausage in her box to provide refreshment at a cheaper rate than the inns could furnish it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MRS. HAMPER BECOMES THE HEROINE OF A FEARFUL ADVENTURE.

THE vehicle in which Mrs. Hamper started from Bologna was certainly not an imposing one. Its wheels had a tendency to waver about undecidedly, like the coaches you see on the stage; and its build was something between a night-cab and a sea-side fly, apparently mended, where its wood-work was deficient, with old cobblers' aprons, gig-leathers, and policemen's capes. It was supposed to be drawn by a horse, inasmuch as something alive upon four hoofs was between the shafts; but this was so concealed by large blue mops, and sheep-skins, and gigantic tassells, bits of cord, useless straps, old cattle-bells, and cumbersome machines of wood, that any one might have called it a mule, or a zebra—or indeed anything he pleased—without fear of positive contradiction. And the driver, who sat upon an old donkey chair-saddle, suspended in front, was just as anomalous as the rest of the turn out, partaking alike of the military, courier, and agricultural classes, with a slight dash of the street-image man. The appearance indeed of the vehicle might have solved the difficult question as to what carriages turn to when they are past work.

The conditions of the journey were that they were to put up that night at Pietramala,—a small melo-dramatically cut-throat-looking village on the top of the Appenine, the inn of which is renowned for having no fastenings to its bed-room doors. The start collected the usual quantity of foreign idlers and mendicants about the hotel; and this was delayed for some little time by the difficulty of arranging Mrs. Hamper's box satisfactorily upon the carriage. For it would not go inside; it would not go on the box; and the roof was too convex to allow it to travel safely there. At last, however, by dint of a great many oaths—which are the most important continental agents in arranging anything—and more pieces of string and thong, it was secured behind; Mrs. Hamper only allowing it to go there upon observing a little hole in the carriage which had once been glazed, through which she could from time to time be assured of its safety.

At last they started off. The beggars muttered their last touching prayers, followed by their last withering curses as they found them unheeded: the postilion cracked his whip, until it echoed along the cool gloomy arcades of the city, making up in noise what he lacked in locomotion, and they got clear of the streets into the country. There was not a great deal to divert Mrs. Hamper's attention from her box, except the vines, which came to the very road-side; not looking like raspberry-bushes as they do in France, but trailing from tree to tree, stretching like vegetable electro-telegraphs, or hanging in graceful festoons, as we have been accustomed to see them represented in annuals and dioramas. And, by the way, in this form the vineyards are beautiful to gaze at; elsewhere, a rich Kentish hop-ground, as viewed from an express train, is immeasurably more picturesque. Then, too, there were plantations of gently-quivering silvery olive trees, the pleasant associations of which—with poets of Boccaccio and the blessings of

peace ; with ordinary minds of salads and cut-glass—were only broken by the rank odour of the following flax-grounds, producing the most villanous smell that a traveller could ever encounter, even in the cleanest parts of Cologne.

The day wore on—slowly enough, for the driver did not hurry himself ; and when he began to ascend the Appenine road, his progress partook of that discomfort and tardiness only known to those who have been long journeys, collectively, in bathing machines ; and the horse was compelled to stop for breath as frequently as a stout gentleman in a post-horn galloppe ; so that the chances were, it would be quite night before they got to Pietramala, if they got there at all. Indeed, at the last inn at Lojano, he waited so long that it required all Mrs. Hamper's strength of mind to get him to start again.

The afternoon sun went down behind the hills on their right, and the greys of evening came stealing up from the valley, when Mrs. Hamper, who had, with a powerful determination, resisted all the impositions of those cheating people who kept inns on the road, thought she might venture to take a little refreshment ; and for that purpose she told the driver, as clearly as she was able, to stop near the first spring of water that he might arrive at. Not a village market-place fountain ; oh no ! because there would be some of the impudent fellows staring at her, who would be certain to be rude ; or perhaps some extortionate innkeeper, whose house they might be near, would put some wine into the carriage by force, and then make her pay for it ; but a nice, cool, natural spring, wherever he might see one tumbling down the side of the road. She had some wine in her box, and a portable leather cup—a very nasty thing that tasted of varnish and shut up like a cocked hat—in her basket ; so that she could make a very good meal. The driver did not appear disinclined to stop ; on the contrary, he knew the very place. But it was a little way on—up the hill, to which the firs now formed a serrated horizon, like an enormous saw set topsy-turvy—and then on to a level space, quite retired, where the Signora could be just as if she was at home. So Mrs. Hamper told him to go on, and she would give him a leather cup full of wine when he stopped.

The carriage went on : up the hill, as the driver had said, and through the firs, and then to a beautifully rural and secluded part of the road on one side of which was a hanging wood, that might have gone up to the moon for aught anybody could have told to the contrary, inasmuch as its termination was hidden by the heavy brushwood that hung almost over the road ; and on the other a deep precipice, the ultimate depth of which was equally unsatisfactory, as to its locality. Mrs. Hamper was admiring the wildness of the scene, and speculating upon the spot at which her little *al fresco* meal was to take place, when she saw a man sitting at the side of the road underneath a cross, of that kind which you see put up to commemorate murders, or grant indulgences to whoever thinks he does right in making a few solitary reverences to the handiwork of the nearest village carpenter.

"A beggar," thought Mrs. Hamper to herself ; "and I shall have to give him some of my refreshments, without which he may be impudent." Then she added aloud to the postilion :

"Drive on a little further ; to the next turn of the road."

"Sì, Signora," replied the man, directly cracking his whip over his head, as Mrs. Hamper believed to urge on the horses, with such activity that it produced a sound like a watchman's rattle. But the noise had the effect of calling into existence other sounds beside those of the echoes. A long shrill whistle, which the most noisy gallery boy on a boxing-night might have envied, was heard in the copse on the right, and this was directly answered from the underwood of the precipice on the left. The man who was sitting at the cross started on his legs, and marching into the middle of the road, for the first time showed that he was armed with an old long gun, which he deliberately presented at the driver's head, telling him to stop. The same instant several of his fellows scrambled on to the road, right and left, all similarly armed, and formed a barrier completely across it.

"I Ladri!" cried the driver in a voice of well-assumed terror, as he turned round and spoke to his passenger.

They certainly were ; albeit they had not altogether the brilliant appearance of their images in little who guard the cheroots in small tobacconists, as they had done at Sprouts's library ; or the dazzling costume of the Massaronis one has encountered at fancy balls. Their outline was the same, but a seeker of the romantic would have missed the satin streamers and plurality of gold watches—the drooping plumes, sparkling jewels, and silver braid, which ornament the popularly received followers of Fra Diavolo. Still, from their hats and guns, and long knives slung about their necks—their half-picturesque dress and general vagabond appearance, there was no question about their being brigands.

Mrs. Hamper saw in an instant all the terrible truth of her situation ; and her first impulse was to scream out as loud as she could, and call upon the driver to protect her. But one of the party, who had not been shaved lately, came to the door of the carriage, and gave such a tremendous growl, through which a command to be silent was plainly audible, that he fixed the frightened lady in such an attitude of speechless horror, anybody might have conceived her to be one of Madame Tussaud's "magnificent additions" travelling in a carriage all to itself. And so would she have continued, had not the driver been pulled off his seat, and made to lie down in the road, with his neck pleasantly acting as a skid to the wheel, which situation it was presumed would in some measure keep him from starting the horse off. As Mrs. Hamper saw the violent deposition of her sole protector, another scream broke from her lips. Upon that the barrel of a gun, so long that it was impossible to conjecture where the stock and lock might be, was thrust into the carriage until the muzzle touched her head ; upon which Mrs. Hamper shut her eyes, and with the calmness of intense mental agony, gave herself up, and wondered when it would go off.

But she was not allowed to remain long in suspense. The door of the carriage was pulled open ; and she was ordered to descend, with very little show of politeness, by three or four of the marauders ; whilst a couple more had very quickly cut away the thongs that bound the box to the hind springs, and carried it to the side of the road.

"Soldi! soldi!" cried the robbers surrounding her, and making a snatch at whatever article of the slightest value they observed in her toilet, as Mrs. Hamper knelt down and hid her face with her hands to shut out the guns, which formed radii from one point all round her, that point being her head.

"Here—here—take it all—every thing," said the unfortunate lady, forgetting every word of Italian and every thing else almost. "Here's my purse—take all I have. Oh dear! what will become of me?"

"Silence!" cried a gigantic fellow, who appeared to be the leader of the party, speaking in French, in the same tones that he would have said "Lie down!" And he snatched away the purse which its owner, with all the alacrity of fear, had drawn from her pocket.

It was a large wealthy-looking purse—one of those which indignant virtue always refuses as the price of guilt in a play; and the robber chinked it triumphantly above Mrs. Hamper's head, and taking his hat off prepared to shoot the contents into it. But his expression of satisfaction somewhat lowered when from the bulkiest end he turned out nothing but a heap of copper coins, some of the smallest value, and a few bits of hoarded iron, with some English halfpence screwed up by themselves in curl papers. The other end contained a napoleon, and a few five franc pieces; being the sum total upon which Mrs. Hamper was about to accomplish her journey to Florence.

The brigands got immediately in a great rage: and began to quarrel so, one with another, that a faint hope crossed Mrs. Hamper's mind of the possibility of their all falling out, and the difference of opinion terminating in mutual annihilation. But this was dispelled, as their violence of action and word ceased, and they all collected together for a conference, with the exception of the sentinel, who still kept the driver's neck down to "scotch" the wheel with. The debate did not last long; for the question, whatever it was, appeared to be carried unanimously. When the council broke up, two of them lifted Mrs. Hamper's box from the ground, and disappeared with it through an acacia hedge at the road side. At the same instant, a scout at the bend of the hill gave a loud whistle, which appeared to intimate that something was coming. The postilion was directly ordered to his legs; the traces and harness of the carriage were cut, and the horse whipped off along the road; the bits of chain and rattletrap that hung about him, scaring him, jaded as he was, into a gallop. Two or three of them next wheeled the miserable carriage to the edge of the precipice and sent it over. Its weight took it down—crashing and smashing amongst the brushwood—until it was no longer visible to casual eyes: and then poor luckless Mrs. Hamper was ordered to accompany them. Of course anything like difference of opinion was quite useless; so the procession started through the thicket and up the road-side hill to the right, headed by the carriers of the box; then the driver with the gun of the romantic appropriator who followed him touching the nape of his neck; next two or three more of the brigands: then Mrs. Hamper with a dishevelled front, and her hands clasped together in scared and speechless incertitude, not knowing to what sad fate she was doomed; and the

file was closed by the remainder of the party. They had not left too soon ; for as the last man entered the thicket, the tramp of approaching horses was heard in the distance, which from its measured sound betokened in all probability a party of the Pope's carbineers.

The brigands with their prisoners pushed on amongst the trees and blocks of granite, putting back the thorny branches of the acacias with their guns, and pulling Mrs. Hamper bodily over such rocks as she was not able to scale ; until from fright, exhaustion, and the steepness of the ascent, the poor lady could not proceed a step further. Upon which two of them joined their hands and made that species of carriage which the children term a king-coach, to transport her. But they had overcalculated their powers. For when Mrs. Hamper was at last compelled, at the gun's muzzle, to take her place, her weight so exceeded their anticipations, that, after they had staggered two steps in advance they broke down, and all three falling on the ground would probably have rolled down the hanging copse together, had not some trees checked them. Seeing this, the leader gave some fresh directions : and turning off along a narrow defile, which looked like a dried up water-course, and where they were obliged to proceed singly, they came after a short time to a comparatively open space on the hill side, surrounded by foliage and rocks, but bearing traces of being frequented. For the grass was in some places shuffled about ; and cigar ends, broken bottles, and scraps of old garments were lying here and there upon the thin turf. An old trunk was then dragged out from some fern and offered to Mrs. Hamper for a seat ; the robbers thinking, doubtless, that now they were at home, it behoved them to show some attention to their new lady visitor : and the postilion being tied to a tree, the process of opening Mrs. Hamper's box commenced.

Its contents formed an odd collection of things picked up all the way on her tour, the first found being the last that were added—the raised pie, and the veneers of Bologna sausage. Articles of clothing were certainly in the minority ; indeed such few things of that kind as there were, served to pack the others in. For there were tokens of Mrs. Hamper's progress on the entire journey ; slabs of pink soap and cheap Eau-de-Boulogne from her first halt ; nine-and-twenty-sous gloves from Paris rolled up and hidden in stockings ; white wood salad spoons and forks from Switzerland stamped "Rigi" but made anywhere ; slippers-full—Mrs. Hamper's slippers made small carpet-bags—of gondola brooches and prison-worked bead inutilities from Venice ; all sorts of Juliet's tombs from Verona, to supply all of which that have been made from the monument itself, the original must have been an entire quarry. And all these things were so mingled with bottles, crockery, lace, fossil bits of cake, apples, and rubbish that could be classed under no category, that the constant fights at the Douanes, which Mrs. Hamper had contested along the road, were easily accounted for.

The box was thoroughly rifled, and as its contents lay scattered on the ground, the gentleman who had not been shaved for so long, approached Mrs. Hamper, and said in a *patois* French,

"You are concealing your effects : you have something else about you."



THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE IN A MOUNTAINOUS COUNTRY.

"No, I have nothing," gasped the lady; "nothing—upon my word of honour."

"Nothing?" asked the brigand, looking so terrible, that he would have made the finest study for a nursery-book ogre ever thought of: "No shawls,—no *jupon* stuffed with money. What's this?"

As he spoke he lifted up Mrs. Hamper's gown with the end of his gun, and discovered another dress underneath it of shot silk. And underneath this, another poke of his carbine revealed the old, original, half washed-out pattern of the chocolate figures on the yellow ground, with the trimming of fringe and tassels, in which we first met her at Sir Frederick Arden's *fête*.

"*Cr-r-ré nom de Dieu!*" cried the brigand. "What is all this?"

"Nothing—nothing," cried Mrs. Hamper, horrified as to where the investigation might end. "They are old dresses—all old; but I always travel so for convenience."

The robber appeared to satisfy himself of the fact, for he looked very contemptuously at the flounces and let them down again. Then, turning a severe eye upon his prisoner, he said:

"You are English; and yet you are travelling without bags of gold. Where do you expect to go to?"

"I don't know, brave homme," replied Mrs. Hamper, with much pathetic politeness. "I am a lone woman,—a widow,—without a friend in the world; but a child—a daughter—in England."

"Is she pretty?" asked the brigand. "Would she like to come and live here?"

Mrs. Hamper was dumb with astonishment at the question, and knew not what reply to make. And, to add to her terror, night was coming on; a bat was fluttering above her head, now and then crossing the rising moon: and she thought she heard an owl.

"Do you know what we are going to do with you?" asked the robber in a deep and solemn tone.

The poor lady could return no answer. Frightful recollections arose of stories told of travellers carried into mountains, from which one of their teeth or fingers was daily sent by the post to their friends, until some enormous ransom was paid. She had heard, too, of fire, and scalping, and gouging—not with brigands to be sure, but amongst the North American savages, who, to her misbalanced ideas at present, were all of the same tribe. And she anticipated many other dreadful things connected with her defenceless position,—so horrifying that she all but fainted. She would have done so in polite life, but here, she mistrusted its effect, so she remained gazing, with a terribly uncertain expression, at the brigand.

"All you English are rich," continued the man; "and, if you haven't got money with you, you are going to have some. We don't let you travel abroad for nothing. So we shall keep you here a little while, until your friends buy you off. You can send any message to them you like."

"I have no friends," screamed Mrs. Hamper. "I know nobody. I am here alone. Let me go—pray, pray, let me go."

"Ah—I know," replied the brigand. "You forget them now, in

tops of the shop fronts, or copings of houses, and pointing with calm dignity to the name of the proprietor.

There were tight fat harlequins, too, dancing on rocking-horses in attitudes of the most forlorn activity ; and large gay umbrellas without handles, and tin fish of no known species, which dangled and spun all day long to the ceaseless torture of the bilious people who lived opposite. You also saw huge gridirons on which a dozen St. Laurences might have been broiled comfortably ; enormous pattens ; and extensive hats and seven-league boots almost as large as Mr. Chirpey's—in fact every convenience for starting a giant in life upon the shortest notice. Travellers almost brought themselves to think that these regions were inhabited by a colony of early pantomime settlers, who still believed in the merit of supernatural size, and fashioned every thing accordingly.

Out and away from these leading outlets of London things were different : for, as in the centre of the metropolis, we find the most magnificent buildings backing upon the realms of the most abject poverty, so in these suburbs did the gigantic evidences of great minds above alluded to closely touch on the haunts of the most diminutive enterprizers. You had but to turn from the principal highway ; and immediately every thing was small and retiring. The highlanders, always on the verge of taking a pinch of snuff, dropped to kilted Tom Thumbs : the gridirons were accommodated to the smallest grates ; and as far as the pattens, hats, and boots went, they were all made to outvie one another in littleness : and were then displayed inside the window instead of swinging boldly and fearlessly in the winds.

There was down one of these streets, a little dirty dingy public-house, so completely thrown into obscurity by two flaunting gin-shops at the corner, that the wonder was how it had contrived, within the very gleam of the costly lamps of its rivals, to exist as long as its aged appearance betokened. It could not have lured many customers from the high-road end of its narrow street, for the two varnished and glazed and gilded wine-vaults would always have turned them from their intention, and led them to enter the more costly portals. And certainly there was very little to reckon upon the other way ; for the street dwindled away to nothing in one of those wild outskirt districts which ordinary persons are supposed never to have explored, and which are only popularly known to be, when a railway conveys people above them. There were adjoining and opposite to it, long rows of little one-storied houses about the size and shape of polling booths, with roofs slanting down behind, of which you would never have been surprised at seeing wood-cuts, illustrating some murder there. You could not tell why : there was nothing particularly brutal in the looks of the people who inhabited them, but you had some hazy recollection of similar places being the scene of former catastrophes. Behind were piles of dingy grass ; stunted leafless remains of bushes, and large uneven plots of ground, shuffled quite bare and worn into hollows by the feet of the countless children always playing there, barely distinguishable from the dust when they crouched down upon it, or heaped it over their fellows.

And about these places, here and there, were dried up tubs and fragments of old machinery, too heavy to run away with; and unfinished foundations of more small houses, and incomprehensible sheds attached to manufactories, and attempts at cabbage-growing, and lanky poultry, who appeared to live in the constant mistake that small chips of oyster-shells and crockery were grains and crumbs capable of nourishing them. For with the occasional variety of a small pebble or two, they had certainly nothing else to eat. But the public-house derived its support from other sources than the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. Who they were we shall now see.

Greenwich Fair was over. The Crown and Anchor had furled its canvass walls: the Bravos and outlawed Barons had retired, for awhile, from public life to their caves and heights, or more properly their cellars and garrets, in various intricate neighbourhoods: and the wonderful individuals generally, who had been accommodated with temporary homes in the yellow caravans, during that period, once more dressed, and ate, and drank like ordinary mortals. Amongst those who rested on their profits, Skittler was enjoying a little repose: the Taglioni waggon had gone to be freshly painted preparatory to coming out as the Cerito—a little change being deemed necessary: and for a day or two, its owner was pursuing no definite line of business, but taking anything that offered, from carrying a bag for a traveller, if it came in his way, to holding a horse whenever he could catch one without running two miles after it upon the mere calculation that its rider was going to call somewhere. In fact he was living upon whatever turned up; and when we next meet him, was entering the public-house in question, which was known as “The Cock and Badger,” and was kept by Nick Mawley—as the name was painted up in its familiar abbreviation—formally known in the P.R. as the Pluckly Crusher.

From his old associates and their patrons, and those who took an interest in sporting matters generally, Mr. Mawley derived his support. He was a good-tempered, honest man: and very difficult to provoke: knowing his giant’s strength he disdained to use it as such—a commendable idiosyncrasy, by the way, of fighting men generally. And his house was a very wonderful place to see—an epitome of Bell’s Life in London, the Sunday Times, and the Era; wherein the editors might have collected all their news without leaving the room from one week’s end to another. For through its narrow channel did the sands of sporting life all pass, as they measured the time of day.

The bar did not differ from others of its class, with the exception that there was a cage hanging over it, in which was a live tiger cat, with large black eyes like beads, whose recollections were carried back to the tropical climes it had quitted by living next to a hot gas light. But the snuggerly behind was remarkable, inasmuch as it was a hive—if such a term may be allowed,—for more dogs than any quick man could ever count, seeing that he never could tell in what strange place to look after them. For some, chained up in couples,—of slender, almost tiny, form; and warranted to kill any number of rats in any time—lived restless lives under the settles of the fire-side: others—bull-dogs of

the lowest extraction, and most plebeian looks it was possible to conceive; deriving, like other curiosities, their chief value from their unparalleled ugliness—rushed out from under flap tables till their collars half choked them, and then went in again. Some were slung in hutches from the ceiling; and scratched perpetually to try and peep over the edges: others bolted out of boxes, and got between the legs of every one that entered, winding their chains or cords indissolubly round the ancles. But with all this canine mob, remarkable ingenuity had been shown in tying them up, for, happily, not one could touch his neighbour; albeit, they struggled hard to do so, living in the constant humour of wishing to fight something. The little den was ornamented, moreover, with stuffed puppies, and heads of defunct champion dogs: and further adorned with large heavy collars, couples, whistles, and stinging whips wherever room could be found for a nail to hang them to.

"Well, Nick—how is it?" asked Skittler, as he entered the house, and addressed the landlord.

"Let me feel your flesh," replied Mr. Mawley, thereby intimating his wish to shake hands.

Skittler understood the dialect: and he clutched his friend, with a grasp on either side that might have cracked a brazil-nut between the palms.

"And how have you been this long time?" continued the landlord. "Come into the bar. I haven't seen you for months."

"I've been alive all the while," said Skittler; "doing well too, as the times go. Only my waggon's being painted just now, so I'm coming the gentleman a bit. I wanted to see you though. I've lots of things to talk about. What—old Sam! how are you, old boy?"

This was addressed to a one-eyed, crooked dog, who crept from a box and acknowledged Skittler as he entered, previously to investigating his boots and ancles with great minuteness.

"He isn't good for much now," observed Mawley. "I tried to learn him tricks with spelling and cards, thinking we might send him round with some of the shows: but he's too old."

"Oh—won't know his letters?" asked Skittler.

"Not a bit," said the other; "he takes 'em up with his mouth very well, but they ain't never the right ones. I was a week learning him to spell John: and how do you think he did it?"

"Shouldn't wonder if he begun with a Jack of Clubs," said Skittler.

"No—he took a S, a eighteen, and the ace of diggers, and wouldn't go on, not for nothing: and when I asked him to point out the young woman that would rather take a walk with her sweetheart than go to church, he stopped at me; and I couldn't get him to move again."

"Will he dance do you think?" asked Skittler; looking at the dog. "That face in a cocked hat and feather, with a frill round the neck, would be worth any money."

"No; he won't dance," said Mr. Mawley; "leastwise, not to speak about. We get him to sit up very well, by keeping him uncommon

short, and hanging a bit of greaves to the ceiling just out of his reach, with a four pound weight round him to hinder him from jumping. But he won't stand on his head, nohows; and sitting on their hind-legs is nothing now, for dogs. But never mind; what did you want?"

"Several things," said Skittler; "and first of all to know what accommodation there is over at the Barracks."

'The Barracks' was a large building that had formerly been a manufactory adjoining the public-house: and was let out in lodgings to a very peculiar race of people. Its windows could be seen at night, all lighted up: not that any festival was being held there calling for this general illumination; but each room was inhabited by a different family, who were generally at home at the same time. In fact, it bespoke poverty rather than festivity. With the inmates of this large building we shall presently make acquaintance.

"There's a plenty of room just now," said Mr. Mawley; "did you expect any friends?"

"No; two or three perhaps," said Skittler; "old pals from the north, who have tramped up. They want to get a girl into one of the theaytres. I told 'em to be here to-night; and I'd see you about it; because they can live cheaper, and may hear sooner of something, amongst the others here, than anywheres else."

"Very good," said the man. "I've got a gent up stairs for a sparring lesson—he's been fighting the sack for the last ten minutes whilst I was here, and I must go back to him. You can join 'em in the parlour. The young Baronet's there, telling more lies than ever."

"Don't put yourself out for me," said Skittler. "I'll go in, and let you know when they come."

And Skittler entered the parlour, which was perfectly lined with pictures of races, fights, coaching, pugilists, and game cocks; and in which a large company was assembled, as well as could be made out through the cloud of smoke that filled the room.

"How d'ye do, Skittler," said a youthful voice through the obscurity, in a tone very different to what might have been expected from the assembled company.

"Ah, Sir Frederick; my service to you," replied Skittler apparently recognising the sound.

"Have a drink," repeated the voice. And then Skittler advanced to the end of the room, where the speaker was sitting, on a kind of elevated division of the covered benches that ran round the public-house parlour.

He was a mere boy—fourteen or fifteen years of age, but dressed in as manly a style as could be contrived; his slim proportions being swelled out by a variety of shawls, coats, and handkerchiefs, which in spite of the season, he kept on. His hair was of a warm tint that his enemies might have designated as red; but the slightest quantity of down upon his upper lip had been coloured, by some kind of dye or cosmetique, several shades darker. He evidently did not belong to the class with whom he was keeping company: for his features were fine and regular; his hands small and white; and his clothes, although cut in a

slangy gentish fashion, were of good materials and work. The hat, too, on the table before him, was a beaver one; and in it were a pair of white kid gloves, and a short stick with a large cut jewel set in its handle. Yet with all this he was smoking a clay pipe: and a pewter pot stood before him. The people in the room treated him with the utmost respect; and he was evidently delighted at being the head of the assembly.

"Have a drink," he repeated, as Skittler advanced: "and take a long pull whilst you are about it. I'm not going to be with you much longer."

"Sorry for that, I'm sure, Sir Frederick," replied Skittler. "How is it we are going to lose you?"

"Back to Eton, my boy," said the young Baronet, for from his name the reader may have imagined that it was the son of Sir Frederick Arden. "School, you know—that's all. But I don't care for it a bit, you know. I thrash all the masters; knock them about just as I please, like so many skittles; and keep six hunters inside the college. They kick up a row sometimes, to be sure. Never mind: wait till I've finished there: and then won't I come out."

"Your change, Sir," said the waiter—a broken down fighting man—handing a handful of silver to the youth.

"Where's your manners?" asked Skittler angrily. "You ain't pretty, but you might be polite. You'd hardly believe, Sir Frederick, he was a 'spectable man once; ah, as 'spectable as you and me. Put the dibs on a waiter."

"Never mind," said young Arden; "I don't want to be bothered with all that change. I've pecks of new sovereigns at home—bins full in the stable. They're all kicking about. I've told you before not to insult me about change. You can keep it."

The man did not require to be pressed, but shovelled it all into his pocket without another word.

"Now, gentlemen," continued the boy; "you must drink goes round with me. I shall beat you though, if it comes to a trial of heads. I can stand anything. I drank six bottles of champagne to my own cheek the last time we rowed up to Surly Hall, and went sober to a party at The Willows after it. Stag—bring goes round; whatever you each please, you know."

"I took that wiry tarrier down to your house, Sir Frederick," said Skittler; "but her Ladyship said she would have no more dogs."

"My mother knows nothing about it," returned young Arden. "If I say I *will* have the dog, that's enough. She only bullies me because I'm young. Pshaw! why in five years time I could turn her out of the house you know. The property's all mine: half England will be mine in five years, and all Surrey. I could imprison my mother in the Tower of London if I chose. I wouldn't; but I could do it."

"In course you could," replied one or two of the men; "in course you could, Sir Frederick."

"But I'll do as I like. I choose to be here, and I am here. It's better than all her slow parties, where you can't let out at all, and the

people know nothing of life—a set of old stuck-up fogies. Wait till I'm my own master entirely—wait till I've got ten thousand pounds a minute, or something like it, that's all, and see if I won't do the right thing!"

"Ah, that we'll be bound you will!" said the chorus.

"She thought—ha! ha!—she thought I'd better not go to the fight next Tuesday, for fear I should get into mischief," said the boy. "Get into mischief—me! me! who could have licked the whole ring, umpires and time-keepers to boot! That was a notion—wasn't it? Ha! ha! ha!"

And the bare idea was deemed such an excellent piece of humour, that the whole room was convulsed with laughter, in the midst of which the guests were served with the liquors the young Baronet had treated them to; upon which they laughed still louder.

"You are such a one, Sir Frederick!" said Skittler.

"Oh, nothing to what I mean to be when I come out!" said young Arden. "In the mean time, gentlemen, here's your healths. I looks towards you."

The slang tone in which these words were uttered produced another burst of laughter; and the company rapped their horny fists upon the table, and said "Good again!" Young Sir Frederick's cheek flushed with the evident pleasure he felt in his position; and he was about addressing them in the fulness of his heart, when the door of the room opened, and the landlord appeared, ushering in some fresh arrivals.

"Come in here!—come in here!" he said; "just for a minute! You'll find somebody you know!"

And the new comers—consisting of Hickory, Patsy, the relict of Luddy, and the Clown who had taken his place—entered.

"Your most obedient, gents," said Hickory, as he bowed to the assembled company. "I hope we isn't intruding."

"Not at all, old man," said Skittler, going forward as he said quickly to young Arden, "Watch the girl, Sir Frederick. Isn't she a stunner?" And then he continued to Hickory, "All these gents is my friends, and I'm your friend; so we're friends altogether."

The little party were still in their performing dresses, and appeared to have been exhibiting as they came along. The Clown put down his drum, and Hickory deposited his umbrella—apparently the umbrella of old—in a corner; whilst Patsy kept close to the woman in a corner of the room, shrinking from the company, albeit she might have cared little for them when forming a ring in the streets.

"Come, old fireworks!" said young Sir Frederick, as he took his eyes from the girl for an instant and turned them on Hickory; "let's see what you can do. I vote for a dance from the young lady. What do you say, gentlemen?"

"Certainly—to be sure! A dance—a dance, if you please, Miss!" echoed the chorus.

The Clown thrust his Pandean pipes into his waistcoat; and Patsy, on a sign from Hickory, came forward into the middle of the room, and

went through one of the anomalous dances which we see outside shows, and between the plays, in strolling theatres. But primitive as was the figure, every attitude in which Patsy fell was so attractive—so graceful and unstudied—that the rough men about leant forward upon the tables to look at her, and when she finished, applauded until all the pots and glasses jumped about, and narrowly escaped falling on the floor.

"Capital—famous!" cried Sir Frederick as she concluded. "Here, my dear—here's something for you!—and what'll you take to drink after it?"

Patsy coloured, as she scarcely knew how to reply. But as the other held out his hand, she advanced with a little waiter which Hickory had been holding, and presented it to the young Baronet.

"Don't be afraid!" he said. "Come nearer. I'm not going to bite you. There's half a sovereign. I suppose I may have a kiss for it. You needn't be ashamed of it. I've kissed all the peeresses in England, and every actress on the stage. Come."

As he spoke he rose from his seat, and appeared about to test the truth of his supposition, as he caught the girl by the wrist, and drew her towards him. She shrunk away, and Hickory at the same moment stepped forward, and put his old umbrella between them.

"No—she don't do that, young Sir," he said. "She only dances."

"Oh—stuff!" replied young Arden. "Get out of the way, can't you? Do you know who I am?"

"No, master," observed Hickory; "nor don't care much. But whoever you are, you musn't annoy her."

And he pushed his umbrella against him.

"Don't do that again!" said the other. "If it wasn't for your gray hairs, I'd thrash you for your insolence."

"If you say a word about my gray hairs again, I'll knock you into the week after next, and perhaps a few days further!" said Hickory.

And he spoke in such a determined tone,—his pride, too, being possibly touched by the allusion to a few gray hairs that peeped from under his comical wig—that young Arden was perfectly astounded. To be thus bearded on what he conceived to be his own proper throne, where every body paid him such deference, was a thing he could not understand at all. However, he did not feel inclined to provoke Hickory's promised assault; so he threw the girl's hand away from him with an oath, and consigned them both to all sorts of places and destinies.

It would not do for Skittler, intimate as he was with all parties, to allow the feeling on either side to go much further; so he cut any more squabbling short by telling Hickory and his little party to follow him, leaving an old hat on the table for such halfpence as they liked to contribute amongst them; and then piloting them across the inn-yard, he led them over to the old manufactory, which, as we have said, now formed a large suburban lodging-house.

"You mustn't mind him, Patsy," he said to the girl, who had been much flurried by the slight broil. "He's only a boy, and gets made too much of here, because he's a Baronet with lots of tin, and a mother



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he don't mind no more than nothink. He'll come to some bad end, if they don't put the drag on ; going down hill with his wheels oiled, he is. Never mind, it's all over ; and here we is."

And pushing against the door, it opened readily and they entered the building.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW MRS. HAMPER FARED WITH THE ROBBERS.

MORNING comes early, and brightly, on the Eastern slopes of the Appennines. Whilst the silver olives and the festooned vines of Ariosto's palace-growing Val d'Arno—the domes and towers of Florence, and the teeming fields surrounding it—are yet in shade, every quivering shrub, and sparkling rock, and glittering campanile on the other side is throwing back the rays of the coming sun.

Mrs. Hamper was awake before the birds, early risers though they be ; not a single chirp, except that of some debauched sparrow, or other common brawler who had not been to sleep at all, resounded through the copse ; and only the highest peaks of the black fir-clad mountains were as yet lighted up, like a pastile burnt but a little way down. She had not lost herself in any of the conventional visions of sleepers generally—no images of old times, and childhood, and friends long gone, and village churches had variegated her slumbers. She had dreamt of the brigands all night long, constantly trying to run away from them, and feeling always unable to do so, (which indeed came nearer what might have actually happened, or was about to occur, than visions generally do) and, consequently, felt no surprise at waking, when her eyes first opened upon the primitive chamber to which she had been consigned.

All was yet quiet, and Mrs. Hamper stealthily ventured to peep out of her abode, through the gloomy grey of very early morning. Her captors of the preceding evening were grouped about still asleep, lying here and there in whatever natural nooks and corners presented themselves. They had, however, all taken care to go to rest upon their guns ; even the postillion whom the poor lady had last seen bound to a tree, for the purpose, as she conceived, of having his skull turned into a perfect cullender with bullets, grasped as good a carbine as any of them, and was as fast asleep.

One of the party only was on the watch. Perched upon a smooth piece of rock he was keeping himself awake by humming a monotonous song, occasionally rising to walk a few steps backwards and forwards, as the drowsiness induced by his vigils, was getting too strong for him ; but these were all the sounds heard. Now and then some wild theory of escape rose in Mrs. Hamper's mind : but when she recollected her

ignorance of the route, and the crashing and rustling of the bushes and underwood that had accompanied her progress, and must necessarily do so again, her heart sank within her. So she retreated into her lodging and waited to see what would turn up.

There is not a more cruel disenchantment than that which attends a first visit to any place abroad, the leading features of which we are only conversant with from dioramas, dissolving views, ballets, and 'stanzas for music', or 'lines on'—wherever the subject may be. Our notions before this, of the localities are always most romantic and highly coloured. We think of France as a lovely country of trellised vines with dancing girls at every turn of the road—of Germany as one vast forest filled with Barons and Freyschutz choruses—of Cashmere as a region of Lalla Rookhs, kitars, and rose groves—of Calcutta as a city, the streets of which are filled all day long with Blue-Beard processions, music, and banners; and indeed of the East generally as an epitome of the Arabian Nights Entertainments. We dream of Swiss milkmaids and Bayaderes; of Grecian daughters and Lights of the Harem; of Bohemian girls, and Conrad-like corsairs: and all sorts of charming personages pertaining to that land of Terpsichorean romance, Silesia: and we people various lands with the most picturesque gondoliers, peasantry, noblemen, and brigands possible to conceive. How roughly all these imaginings are upset, those alone know who have travelled in the expectation of having them realized.

And Mrs. Hamper made no exception to the rule; for when she regarded the brigands, in the growing light of morning, she could not help remarking how very different they were to those she had been accustomed to paint in her mind. But all her thoughts were upset, by the chief of the party coming to her, as the camp arose from its slumbers, and inquiring whether she had yet thought of any friends in the neighbourhood, who were sufficiently attached to her to send a ransom, upon hearing of her situation.

In vain Mrs. Hamper assured him that she knew nobody. The brigand swore—with oaths so terrible, even in Italian, that they would have scorched and withered any body if translated—that the English were acquainted with every body all over the world, and kept large boxes of money in every city. And he was getting somewhat too violent in his manners to be pleasant, when one of the fellows called his attention to the faint sound of a bell tolling amidst the mountains. This was from the Church of Pietra-mala; and on hearing it the brigand immediately crossed himself, and commenced a long confidential speech to what appeared to be a child's doll, dressed in different bits of rained-out silk, and fastened, by a long nail through its neck, to a tree. After which, apparently feeling relieved in his mind, his anger seemed to have subsided, and he gave hints about breakfast.

The band were busy about, looking up some rude implements of cookery from hiding-places in decayed trees and overhanging rocks; and poor Mrs. Hamper was trembling with fright, as she wondered what they would do next; when one of the party, whom she had not seen before, rushed through the foliage, and with an expression of great

hurry and alarm spoke a few words to the captain of the gang. In an instant the entire troop was in motion, running about in the confused haste that the tenants of an ant-hill exhibit when poked up by a stick ; and before long dragged half-a-dozen mules from their coverts, all charged with pack-saddles. A ray of hope streamed across Mrs. Hamper's despair. The brigands were evidently surprised disagreeably, and she might be overlooked and left behind in the hurry !

No such thing, though, was about to happen. They collected the miscellaneous late contents of her box, stuffing them back again as they best could ; and then putting it on the top of one of the mules' loads, led another of the animals towards the entrance of Mrs. Hamper's lodging, and intimated that she was to get upon it. In the absence of steps, stirrup, or saddle, they might as well have ordered her to fly off upon a broom.

"Brave homme!"—commenced Mrs. Hamper to the chief who spoke French.

"Bah !" was the interrupting reply. "Montez, madame, montez !"

"But I can't !" said Mrs. Hamper. "I never was a horsewoman. Oh dear ! oh dear ! What is to be done ! Gentlemen—"

"Presto ! presto ! Corpo di Dio !" cried the troop in angry impatient tones, looking knives and bullets at her.

She was about to throw herself on her knees, and once more appeal to their sympathies, by touching attitudes ; but the two who had attempted to carry her the evening before, assisted by the captain, lifted her up in a most unceremonious fashion,—not without some difficulty,—and deposited her on the back of the mule, having first thrown a sheepskin over it ; whereon she sat for an instant with that evident feeling of insecurity which characterises a bird perched on a loose clothes line or the wire of an electric telegraph.

"Hi !" cried the brigand, giving the mule a bang with the butt-end of his musket. "Hi !"

The animal, however, positively refused to move ; or rather its quivering legs indicated that it could not, under such a remarkable burden. In vain they pushed, and tugged, and beat ; the mule was kept to the earth, like a rock, by the superincumbent weight. In exceeding anger, the leader of the gang pulled poor Mrs. Hamper off, in a most unceremonious manner ; and was about to order her to be marched along between two of his fellows, when the report of a gun rang sharply through the foliage below them ; and the brigand, who had been on the look-out, darted from his post, took off his hat, looked at it, gave a nod of satisfaction and swore an oath of surprise, and then returned the fire, aiming at hazard amongst the brushwood.

In an instant all was confusion. The party retreated towards the end of their glen, leaving Mrs. Hamper on her knees, when they were met by a party of mounted carbineers, who immediately ordered them to lay down their arms. At the same instant several of the soldiers, on foot, broke through the copse, followed by a mob of peasants.

Resistance was useless : for the soldiers trebled the number of the brigands. Both parties, however, instinctively raised their guns, which

was more terrible to Mrs. Hamper than anything else had been : first because she regarded the going off of guns with the usual horror of her sex : and secondly, because she was, as it were, a sort of target between the two parties. Neither, however, fired. The chief told the fellows to surrender, knowing that they would all be shot through and through if they did not.

During this time, the postillion who had seemingly overslept himself, and only appeared just before the arrival of the soldiers, after two or three vain attempts to tie himself up to a tree, was quietly walking away behind the mob, when a gentleman in a travelling English dress caught him by the ear, and pulled him back into the centre of the assembled group.

A faint scream of surprise broke from Mrs. Hamper's lips as she recognised the stranger, who in his turn was equally astonished.

"Edward Ellis!" she cried, as soon as her astonishment allowed her to speak.

"My dear aunt!" said the young man ; "what a most extraordinary meeting."

And flinging the postillion to the charge of one of the carbineers, he ran towards Mrs. Hamper : and raised her from the ground.

"To think of finding you in such a plight," he said ; "I was stopping last night at Le Maschere, and the inn-keeper told me that there was going to be an attack made on some brigands. So I came with the village people to see the fun."

It appeared that the horse of Mrs. Hamper's conveyance had attracted the attention of the patrol on the route ; who had also discovered, from the marks of scuffling in the road, the manner in which her carriage had been disposed of. The party of brigands had long infested the Appennine road ; but the carbineers, not knowing how many there might be, had, on this occasion, left two of their party as scouts, to watch the movements of the robbers until the morning, when they brought up their reinforcements. The villagers had turned out with them as they would have done to a bull-baiting or a boar hunt ; and young Ellis, who was on an autumnal tour had joined the party.

Fifty hands were immediately in readiness to bind the robbers ; and when Mrs. Hamper had recovered a little from her consternation, she pointed out her box : then, going round with the commanding officer made the brigands give up all the things they had severally taken away, indulging in bitter English epithets to each of them, such as calling them "nasty impudent fellows," and "dishonest people," and other strong names : telling the peasants, however, all the time to hold them fast. And then the whole *corsège* prepared to descend.

Mrs. Hamper had been so upset as to her nerves, in the late trials she had undergone, that she declared her inability to move a step by her own exertions. So one of the stoutest horses of the carbineers—a large black animal that would have been doomed to a dray in England—was selected to carry her ; and some half-dozen of the soldiers contrived



James H. McHenry

a species of ladder with their guns, by which Mrs. Hamper managed to mount, behind one of the Pope's guards, who wore such a pair of moustachios that nothing else was seen at a distance.

The brigands were confided to the care of the peasants; the mules, with their loads, being driven on first. Mr. Ellis walked by the side of his aunt, who was still in great trepidation, as they descended on a ledge of pathway overhanging a gorge, which the slightest swerve of the horse could have sent them down into; but withal calling up romantic feelings, as she could not help likening her conductor to a knight-errant of old, and herself to a distressed damsel. Now and then, however, she descended to common-place topics, in a series of inquiries of her nephew, as to the amount of money he had with him; and what small change he could accommodate her with for a little time, as she had lost a large sum in five-franc pieces, which of course she could not identify, although they were, without doubt, amongst the spoils. And, as she observed, she would wish to remunerate the preservers of her life and honour handsomely; but, at the same time, with due regard to prudence, not to be lavishly extravagant.

Her nephew here put her mind so entirely at rest upon the score of supplies, that Mrs. Hamper thought possibly it would be best to remain with him for the rest of the tour—

"For after all," she said, "although my dear Lady Parlawar's connections are so anxious that I should join them, yet, being newly married people, they will be so wrapt up in each other, that it will be very dull for me."

"I fear I shall travel too rapidly for you, my dear aunt," said Mr. Ellis, rather alarmed.

"Oh, not at all," replied Mrs. Hamper; "I am used to rough it. Look at me here. I declare, now the affair is over, I would not have missed it for anything; there's nothing like excitement."

"But you have seen Switzerland."

"Oh! I can see it again and again. Ah! bless me; I thought we were over! No: he's a very steady man, this, I'm sure; and very handsome. But, as I said, if any place will bear repetition, it's Switzerland. And it will be cheaper for both, you know."

"But I have some notions of going up Mont Blanc," observed Mr. Ellis, getting uncomfortable at the prospect of a travelling companion.

"Well, my dear Edward, I suppose I can go up too," replied Mrs. Hamper, half nettled at finding the slightest disposition on the part of her nephew to throw difficulties in the way. "I presume ladies are allowed?"

"Oh, yes, my dear aunt, they are allowed; but it is really very awkward. One went up a few years back—a Mademoiselle Dangeville—but then—"

"What then, Edward?" asked Mrs. Hamper sharply, in a tone that meant she did not intend the answer to have any effect upon her.

"Why, she wore trowsers—in, fact a man's dress altogether,—the last third of the journey. You could not very well do that."

"And why not, Edward?" asked Mrs. Hamper. "When Mr.

Hamper was in the Yeomanry Cavalry, I once put on his clothes to frighten your poor mother, and they said I made a very good man. It is some time ago, to be sure ; but I see myself in them now."

So did Mr. Ellis ; but as his aunt smiled, he laughed.

"I am sure if this brave gentleman before me," she continued, alluding to the carbineer, "could lend me his dress this evening, when he retired to rest, you would be astonished."

Other people might have been, but not Mr. Ellis. For his aunt was in the habit of doing such extraordinary things, that it would not have surprised him to have seen her put on jack-boots and a helmet to finish her tour in altogether, if she had had them by her. But seeing that she was resolved to go with him ; and moreover, being very fond of Fanny, he determined to make the best of it ; and, at all events, keep her within bounds, and not cause her to adopt any strange costume by implying his disbelief in her ability to wear it.

So they settled to travel together—at all events, into Switzerland ; and on arriving at the inn, amidst the uproar of the entire village, Mrs. Hamper directly went to bed. For her imperfect rest the night before, and the excitement altogether, had knocked her up, competent as she was to undergo anything in general. But she begged her nephew would remunerate the carbineers, and order them refreshment at the inn. "It need not be anything expensive," she whispered, "for the Italian soldiery are not used to luxuries—some of the common wine of the country will do very well, and that high-flavoured cheese, of which a very little goes a great way."

And then, hoping to be on the road again that evening, she retired to rest, "and dream," as she added, "of the darkened Jura, and that monarch of mountains—Blanc !"

CHAPTER XXXI.

BESSY PAYNE IS ON THE EVE OF GETTING INTO A SCRAPE.

It was a rule with Mr. Chirpey, that Bessy Payne and Sprouts should always dine with him on Sunday ; and nothing could be more merry than these little parties were. The jolly man was doubly jolly on these occasions ; and his heartiness made all the party the same, including baby, who was a capital audience for a few months old, laughing and crowing at all the fun as loud as the rest of them. And even when the others were quiet, baby seemed to find jokes in the ceiling, smiling constantly as its filmy blue eyes wandered about in that direction.

The progress made by the young folks during the week, in their worldly affairs, was always the principal topic of conversation. Tom spoke of new customers, and increased demands for "nuts to crack" and theatrical portraits, which last had led him to add to his store a collection of gorgeous tinsel dots, and stars, and lions, to adorn the different

heroes. And as a specimen of their effect, he had Mr. Hicks, as 'The Avenger,' in a panoply so dazzling that no eye might have borne him in the sun. This was the great feature of the window; and for weeks after he came out, Tom was almost worried to death by the court children, who, in their bewildered admiration, did nothing but drop their tops and balls down the area, or get their feet wedged into the grating, as they stood over it before the window.

And Bessy, too, was flourishing—doing so well, that there was every reason to suppose the library attractions would soon be divided into books and bonnets. When the windows were open, on the fine summer afternoons, Tom could hear her clear voice, singing against her bird as usual; and now and then he saw her bright face peeping over the plants to look after him, and nod, as she put the little coquettish cap she was making on her nice oval head, somewhat conceited about both. One week, however, she was more than usually busy; and then she told her friends on Sunday, that she had got the work of a large school at Hammersmith to do—having been recommended by one of the governesses whom she made for; and that she was going there the next day.

Mrs. Sadler's Establishment for Young Ladies, Bellfield House, Hammersmith, which was termed in the prospectus, the most rural and pleasant of suburban villages,—calling up images perfectly delightful,—was well known to all the readers of the Supplement to "The Times," as an establishment where the pupils were led to feel an interest in learning, its utility being recommended by kind treatment; and where the best scholastic acquirements were united to the comforts and parental watchfulness of a well-regulated home. Mrs. Sadler herself was a lady of imposing presence; tall and stately, and severe; knowing Mangnall by heart, as well as being a great artificial florist; immense on rice-paper, and believing much in the virtues of perforated card-board and coloured worsteds; credulous as to the merits of Oriental tinting, and fond, to a fault, of rapid variations by Hertz. Mademoiselle Le Brun, the resident Parisian,—there was a suspicion that she had once been Miss Brown,—was fifty, trying to be thought eight-and-twenty. She rouged slightly, and wore long black ringlets; and had been crossed in love, as she had admitted once every quarter since she had been at the school to the eldest pupil, to whom she had also shown a portrait of a gentleman in a red coat, whom she called Victor. She was very great about the continent, and spoke, with an accent, of "*cette belle Touraine*;" and would murmur, with sad melody, "*Quand je quittais la Normandie*,"—which the more wilful of the pupils imagined must have been a long time ago. She always spoke of Florence and Leghorn as Firenze and Livorno; and had an old guitar, upon which, after a long battle with the pegs, and watching where both her fingers were going, she produced certain unholy sounds, intended as accompaniments to French ballads. In "*La Folle*" she especially delighted, giving the "*Tra la la la*" burden with great intensity; and her "*Jeune Fille*," which in her gay moments she addressed to the favourite pupil, was very pretty and playful. She was also cunning in chalk drawings; and

had reproduced the old man in the helmet, which amateurs in crayons always rush at so earnestly, as many times as she numbered summers.

Then the dancing-master, Mr. Pitkin, came once a week in a little pony chaise, with a little boy on a little seat behind, who played on a little fiddle during the lessons. The seat had been fastened on, as a supplement, in a frightfully insecure manner; but this was a very artful contrivance. For it was, so to speak, the safety governor of the entire machine; inasmuch as a too heavy weight would have raised the pony from the ground and overbalanced the whole affair. But if this was by chance applied, the seat broke off before the accident occurred, and equilibrium was restored.

Then there was the show English teacher, who was presented to parents and guardians, and the friends of young ladies wishing to find comfortable homes for them; and the slow ditto, who kept the keys and checked the laundress. And when we add to these one or two periodical professors—wandering persons of talent, who came whenever a pupil was to learn anything they taught, and wore cotton gloves, and took snuff—the staff of Bellfield House was complete.

There was a Mr. Sadler, but he was never seen by any chance at all, except now and then by favoured pupils, who had thin bread and butter, and thinner tea, in the parlour on Sunday evenings. And then the impression he created was not what might have been expected from the partner of so universally gifted a woman as his wife. Nobody could tell what he had been; nor indeed was anybody clearer about Mrs. Sadler's early history. Wicked brothers of some of the girls declared they had seen her ride at Astley's, in a spangled habit, over a flaming bridge; but this was a great shame.

She had a great many pupils. Every fine morning they might be seen walking along the highway, two and two, and always passing in front of opposition establishments whenever practicable. Unsteady young men had been known to nod to them from the tops of omnibuses; and others in gigs, when they approached, pulled their horses in with a tighter hand, and whipped them harder, to get up a dashing effect. And on such occasions the pupils looked severe at the insolent strangers, but always had a quiet titter amongst themselves respecting them when they had gone by. And their private laughter increased when Mademoiselle Le Brun hinted, how unpleasant it was to be stared at, and that she never could go out without such being the case. It really became quite a persecution!

The pupils were all very pretty; taken in the mass, remarkably so. First and foremost, Miss Fanny Hamper had already broken the hearts of all the young gentlemen, from fourteen upwards, who had the *entrée* of Bellfield House, or sat within eye-shot of its inmates at church. Fanny Hamper's age was a mystery. Her mother had said she was eighteen: her friends agreed it was shameful to keep her at school, as she would never see two-and-twenty again. And her friends were, in all probability, very near the mark.

Admitting, therefore, that she was of the latter age, some slight

excuse might be made for her being the leader of all the mischief that the young ladies contrived; although it would not have done for Mrs. Sadler to have parted with her, on account of her recommendations; for this cause, also, she paid a lower rate of terms, through her mother's management, than any other pupil in the school.

But through her alone had the high tarred close palings been put up where the play-ground looked into the brick-field, in consequence of bold and forward appointments there made. She alone, instead of walking at the head of the promenade advertisement, was kept close to the teacher's elbow, that she might never return the impertinent salutations of strangers. To her were more than half the letters addressed, that the postman brought to Bellfield House; and which, on being very properly opened by Mrs. Sadler, were found, in some cases, to be evident answers to preceding epistles; and in others, directions to look out for a young gentleman with a white handkerchief in his hand, or a sprig of fuchsia in his coat, when she next walked out. All the servants were constantly getting into scrapes respecting the transmission or receiving of her messages; and the number of 'impertinent young men,' as Mrs. Sadler called them, who were constantly lounging about in front of the house, and looking at the wire blinds of the upper windows was perfectly disgraceful. And as if Miss Hamper was not lost enough to her own sense of propriety, she had so poisoned the minds with the deadly venom of flirtations, and delicious waltzes, and the fun of getting engaged for the pleasure of breaking it off in three weeks afterwards—so wrought upon the feelings of Miss Herbert, and Miss Clifford, and Miss Maurice, the three next pupils in seniority and beauty—that, as Miss Grita, the teacher, declared with tears in her eyes (the combined result of indignation and influenza), "Miss Hamper had made them quite as bad as herself."

One fine afternoon, Fanny Hamper and her friends were so closely engaged in conversation under the tree—which, there was a tradition, she had one day even tried to climb—that nothing but mischief could have been the subject; and so it proved.

"Oh, my goodness—I never did!" they exclaimed in accents of intense surprise. "And you are going to do this, Fanny?"

"Certainly; why not? Won't it be fun? Going just as you like, without a chaperone: dancing with whom you please; and coming away just when you choose. Don't you wish it was you, Laura?"

Miss Maurice was a pretty blonde, with a coquettish *nez retroussé*, and very dazzling teeth. She laughed, and said she scarcely knew—it was so very terrible!

"But fancy the enjoyment," continued Fanny Hamper, "the Richmond Ball!—and all the officers from Hounslow and Hampton Court—that dear Twelfth! You never studied the Army List. The 'Sphinx,' 'Egypt,' 'Peninsula,' 'Waterloo!' Oh!"

And Fanny Hamper clasped her hands together in the most earnest enthusiasm, and gave a jump in the air.

"But you will be found out," said Kate Clifford, who was tall,

dark, with flashing eyes, and lashes that swept her cheeks ; "you must be. Think of the disgrace !"

"Not at all," replied Fanny. "My dears, it's all settled, and I'm going. Mamma's in France, and when I'm in a crowded waltz, who is to know who chaperons me. Besides, suppose it is found out. What then? The Richmond Ball is not a thing to be ashamed of being seen at, I can tell you. Vouchers are not picked up so easily."

And Fanny was quite indignant.

"But how have you got a voucher?" asked Louisa Herbert.

"Frederick Arden got one—not in my name, of course: but who's to know? And we're to go down in a cab."

"Alone!" cried all the girls, paralyzed.

"No, not alone; but there it is," said Fanny Hamper; "I have not got anybody to depend upon, that can go with us. I have a chance, though:—that young person who comes here for work—Miss Payne. Do you know, I'm going to ask her."

"But how can you get away, Fanny," said Miss Maurice. "Really, it seems the wildest scheme I ever heard of—wild even for you!"

"I shall get away, and come back again, famously; you'll see if I don't: and Mrs. Sadler won't be any the wiser. Oh! it's glorious!—quite a romance! Now you know, Kate, you would like to go."

"I'm sure I should not."

"I'm sure you would. And with a young Baronet too!—not a shabby knight that any one could be, but a Baronet. And he says that he means to go into the army—an officer! Oh!"

And there was another enthusiastic clasp of the hands.

Miss Hamper might have let her friends still further into her confidence, had not the voice of one of the teachers called them up to the parlour, where their presence was required.

The midsummer breaking up ball was approaching; and the inmates of Bellfield House were all absorbed in the matter of their dresses. Bessy Payne had been recommended as a good and reasonable milliner—*couturière*, as Mademoiselle Le Brun always called her, even when speaking in English; and she was now there, by appointment, to receive instructions for the dresses. And it was going to be a very grand affair: all the friends of the young ladies, and even the friends' friends were coming; and there were to be bushels of silver-paper water-lilies made to adorn the school-room; and a quadrille of young ladies, all in emblems of the twelve months—Fanny Hamper insisting upon being July, because she could wear a very low dress, as became hot weather.

As the directions respecting the make and fitting on of a young lady's dress are things that an author can be expected to know nothing about—or, at least, ought not—we can omit a description of the manner in which Bessy was worried, and ordered, and countermanded, and appealed to, until she scarcely knew where she was,

or what she was to do. But at last she arranged everything; and was about to leave, when Fanny Hamper followed her into the passage, and said hurriedly :

"You can assist me very much : and I will give you a great deal of money if you promise to keep it a secret."

Bessy was quite confused at the sudden attack, and could scarcely reply. Fanny Hamper, however, saved her the trouble.

"Were you ever in love?" she asked.

It was an extraordinary question. Bessy thought of Sprouts, and was on the point of answering, but another notion came into her head—that perhaps real young ladies, like Miss Hamper, did not call being in love what she imagined it; and that they would not think it possible to be so with Tom, if they saw him. But the next moment all her indignation was excited against herself, for having for a moment conceived that Sprouts was not quite as good as, and perhaps a great deal better than, anybody they knew. She answered, however,

"No, Miss : that is to say—not much."

"Yes; but you know what it means, don't you?" said Fanny Hamper. "Well, never mind : you know it's very nice, at all events. Now, I want you to help me—will you? You are the only one that can. Will you?"

"I don't know what it is," replied Bessy.

"Oh, never mind. But promise me—will you help me? I am so fond of him!"

And Fanny Hamper tried to look so like eighteen in the dilemma of a first affection, that Bessy was quite touched. And perhaps, after all, it was not all deceit. Her mother had always kept her down so strenuously, that her nature was entirely subdued and stunted by the course of education she had been subjected to. Her years had been crammed down into her existence, making her disposition like the charge of a rocket—very compact and orderly to regard, but terrific when it did go off.

"Look here, and attend," said Fanny; "for they will be out directly. She's such a horrid old thing, that Mrs. Sadler! Do you think you can get my dress ready by Tuesday?"

"But it is not wanted for a fortnight," said Bessy.

"Hush! you don't know what I mean. Somebody I care very much for is going to take me to a ball; but *she*"—and Fanny pointed towards the door—"must not know anything about it. Now I want you to finish my frock by that time, and come and dress me."

"But what will Mrs. Sadler say?" asked Bessy.

"Oh! Mrs. Sadler mustn't know anything about it; no, not for ever so much. But it's really all quite proper : I should not ask you, you know, if it was not. You must come and dress me at the inn. I will give you—at least somebody else will—anything—a sovereign—two—as much as you like. I am sure if I thought you cared for anybody, I would do it directly."

Without taking any view of their comparative positions, Bessy was

influenced by Miss Hamper's last speech, which was uttered in a tone intended to taunt her into compliance.

"But how could I stay away from home?" she asked.

"Oh! you can manage all that, you know—very well. I suppose you are your own mistress: I am not. I shall be though, some day; perhaps very soon: and then I shall not forget you. Will you come down to the inn where all the omnibuses stop, on Tuesday evening, with my dress?"

Bessy hesitated for an instant; but Fanny Hamper, who was allowed in their school plays to be an excellent actress, put on such an appealing expression that she could not refuse her. For she thought if she was to be shut up, how kind she should think it of anybody who procured her the means of seeing Sprouts; so she said at last—

"I will come down. But you must keep it quite a secret. It would be dreadful for me if it was found out."

"And you will go with us to Richmond?"

"I did not promise that," said Bessy.

"But you will, I am sure. I cannot go alone, you know. I will clear you from all blame, admitting that it was found out. But that, there is not a chance of. Will you come?"

"Well, then—I will," said Bessy.

"Oh, thank you—thank you!" answered Fanny Hamper. "And look here—one thing more: put this letter in the post when you go out; but don't let anybody see it."

And she pulled a letter from the bosom of her high school dress, and gave it to Bessy.

"Recollect," she said; "at the inn I told you of: on Tuesday. Don't be later than ten o'clock; and don't forget to put a narrow edge—very narrow—of silver round the flounces. And two little bouquets—very little tiny bouquets, you know. You won't forget, will you?"

"Oh, no; I won't forget," said Bessy, as she put the note in her pocket and tripped off, just as Mrs. Sadler came out of the parlour into the passage.

"What are you doing here, Miss Hamper?" she asked.

"Me, Ma'am?" inquired Fanny.

"Yes, you. Do you suppose I address anybody else?"

Fanny Hamper thought that Mrs. Sadler had never looked so like a high-minded Astley's queen as she did at present; and began to think that what the wicked brothers of several of the girls said must be right.

"I was afraid that Miss Payne had not understood me about my dress," said Fanny.

"Oh, she understood you perfectly," replied Mrs. Hamper. "She is a very intelligent young person, and does every thing she is told."

Fanny hoped that such might be the case. And then with her head full of anticipations of Frederick Arden, and the Richmond Ball, went back to the play-ground and her particular friends.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PATSY BECOMES ACQUAINTED WITH MANY REMARKABLE FRIENDS.

THE room to which Skittler introduced his little party was a large square apartment, with whitewashed walls and ceiling, and a sanded floor. A long table ran down the middle, over which were two bright gas jets that were humming again in their energy to make a good light. At the end was a long range covered with small saucepans, hanging gridirons, and coffee-pots. There was also a heavy iron fender, some forms, and some anomalous-looking boxes; and these completed the furniture of the lodging-house: for such it now was.

As they entered the room, Skittler's appearance provoked a general cry of recognition; and even Hickory appeared to know some of the inhabitants, and shook hands at once with a dark gentleman, who wore his face tattooed, with all the cordiality of old acquaintance. To the greetings, Skittler gave a collective reply by a single wink; and then, not put out by the singular people who surrounded him, he did not trouble himself to introduce his companions further, but took a place on an inverted pickled salmon kit near the fire, and was directly at his ease; something more than putting his lips to a mug of mulled beer, fresh from a tin foolscap turned topsy-turvy, which had been crammed violently into the fire by the dark gentleman aforesaid.

"Here's to everybody," said Skittler: "least wise, all as is here."

Which being in a measure an exclusive toast, and not intended to apply to the world at large, was acknowledged in various pantomimical fashions of a masonic nature.

Hickory found out a convenient spot in which to deposit his umbrella; and the Clown put down his drum on the table, whilst the widow of Luddy, and Patsy, at once took their places on a form where some of the lodgers made room for them. Everybody in the house became acquainted directly. They all met so many strange faces every day, that no new comers disturbed them: on the contrary, the longer they remained together, the more novel it appeared to them. And even Patsy, who had shrunk from the every-day people in the parlour of the public-house, did not seem to be at all moved by the remarkable society she had been thrown into.

And, truth to tell, the world at large would have been driven to its straits—from Bherings to Magellans, or any other more distant ones, if such there be undiscovered—to have collected a company of equal singularity to that now assembled in the room. For the inmates of the lodging-house were chiefly composed of those remarkable people who pass the greater portion of their lives behind the chintz curtain at the end of a caravan; and whose notions of the English character are formed from the study of their penny patrons alone—their somewhat

singular appearance, or accomplishments, not allowing them to mix much in the great world.

At the side of the fire-place an Albino girl, or—"white Circassian negress," as she was proclaimed, at fair time, from the platform,—was superintending the preparation of some mysterious soup for the supper of herself and husband—the dark tattoo'd foreigner in whose peaceable demeanour you would have discovered no trace of the "black wild Indian," by which title the fair folks only knew him. The long white hair of the Albino, which resembled spun glass in the show, was now carefully papered up in bits of play-bill all round the top of her head; and in this state it remained from fair to fair; the constant combing and brushing it was there subjected to, as she paced up and down the creaking floor of the caravan being quite sufficient to last over the interregnum. Her eyes, stated at such periods to be always in motion, now somewhat belied the story of the showman, by the intentness with which they were fixed upon the saucepan. In a long box at her feet, and before the fire, was something evidently alive, as the uneasy motion of an old blanket under the half-closed lid testified. And, in fact, every now and then, a couple of alligators, made lively by the warmth, and smelling the odours of the various culinary preparations about the kitchen range, protruded their heads and looked about them, until driven back by an infant Daniel Lambert, in a low dress of plaid rather the worse for wear, trimmed with blackened silver lace, who divided his time between keeping the reptiles in order with a switch, and slowly swallowing the contents of a huge basin of soup, three of which he was compelled to finish every day, over and above his meals, to keep him in condition.

Nor were these the only members of the brute creation in the room. At the end were many odd-shaped cases, from which scratchings, and whistlings, and occasional sounds of struggles for superiority, proceeded; whilst in an open cage, at the top of this heap, were two monkeys, one of whom was testing the nourishment to be derived from splitting the straws of his bed; and the other was lying in wait to clutch the tail-feathers of a melancholy smoky macaw, who was trying to compose himself to sleep upon a hot perch in front of a blazing gas pipe.

There were many people of ordinary appearance about the room; but they were all endowed with marvellous acquirements when you came to know them. Two of them, eating at a table, were the Bound-ing Brothers of Olympus, who had exchanged the dirty tights and tarnished spangled braces of the streets, and fairs, and race-courses, for the old coat and corduroys of domestic life. Another was a conjuror; he could also stand upon a red-hot poker, put tobacco-pipes into his eyes, and swallow lozenges of melted lead. With this latter, Hickory appeared to enjoy an acquaintance of long standing, and so did the Clown; for they both entered, at once, into friendly conversation.

"How did you do at the last fair?" asked Hickory of the necromancer.

"Not much good," replied the other. "I don't know how it is, but people won't see shows as they used to. It's all along of the railways, I say. They won't come to see Indians, and they don't care for the Banded Armadillos no more than if they was hedgehogs. But the Indians is the greatest failure."

"I knew they would be," said Hickory; "and serves 'em right, for being foreigners."

"But Parsons isn't a foreigner," answered the wizard, dropping his voice and pointing to the black wild Indian by the fire-place. "He got in the bush and was tattooed by force. But all the Indians, real or false, is used up: and people only laughs at 'em. I've seen the day when Parsons, there, frightened the people so, that after they'd paid a penny to get in, they'd give twopence to be let out again—and glad to do it. But now they laughs at him, and says, 'Come, old feller, give us Jim Crow—give us Jim Crow,' they says."

"I believe shows is shut up," observed Hickory, "and that people wouldn't come, not if you got a mermaid that danced a hornpipe. It's not steam—it's them penny books that chokes us, and nothing else. People finds out there's no such things, and so won't come to see them."

"I think you're right, governor," said the Clown, speaking for the first time.

He had not, however, been unemployed during this short dialogue; but having opened a small bundle he carried tied to his drum, had been sewing some tufts of coloured worsted to a cotton night-cap which was to form a new head-dress.

"I believe you're right. Before I went into the circus I had a caravan of my own, and could do anything then. I was the first man that shaved a bear to make a pig-faced lady."

And if he had invented the steam-engine, gun-powder, or printing, he could not have spoken with greater pride.

"And when," continued the Clown, "and when we wanted a cockatrice to pit against Jackson's sea-dog—which was nothing in the world but his old Snap, as had parallel fits in his hind-quarters from being run over, sewed up in ile-skin from his waist downwards—I turned one out in two days from an old barn-door fowl we cotched at Dorking, and all that was left of a crocodile's tail. But they wouldn't come to see that now: and not all the pictures on earth will make 'em."

There was a pause in the conversation as Hickory and the Wizard smoked their pipes, and appeared endeavouring to detect, in the light rising vapours, the causes of the decay of sight seeing. The Clown kept on at his work until having perfected his tri-coloured cock's-comb to his satisfaction, he put it on before an irregular piece of looking-glass propped up against a blacking-bottle on the table, and commenced to try its effects by making such faces as clowns indulge in when they read difficult directions, or begin to feel the effects of unpleasant refreshment purloined and swallowed without a due inquiry into its properties and quality. There was something comically dismal in his postures and contortions, unaided as was his appearance by any paint or

motley attire ; and the tranquil spiritless manner in which, he from time to time, exclaimed, "Halloo!" "I'm a looking at you!" "Here's somebody coming!" or "Now don't be a fool!" would have made an impression upon any one not so habituated to see a clown in private life, as the members of this little community of curiosities.

For, to the people of the common world, whose functions are but to eat, and drink, and stare about them, the clown is regarded as a creation, incomprehensible, and apart from mortal organisation. His infancy is not believed in. He could never have been a child. We ourselves, have seen little clowns in pantomimes ; but we always looked upon them as abortions—small objects that called up an indefinable feeling of repugnance—a mixture of the unpleasant sensations excited by precocious children, undersized gents, and cockroaches. To the world, the clown has ever been an adult ; perpetually painted and living a constant life of comicality, even in the bosom of his family : bringing home the objects of domestic consumption—coals, beef, and tubs of table beer—in his pockets : taking shops and businesses that are to let, in a wild and reckless spirit of trading, without capital, connection, or the slightest knowledge of the commerce he has embarked in, except in tying on his apron and bowing politely to old lady customers, whom he immediately afterwards cruelly insults and frightens to death : wantonly maltreating fashionable or foreign gentlemen, and obtaining goods under false pretences from any one weak-minded enough to trust him, or to believe him when he says, "That's me!" after reading the directions on parcels being taken home. In fact, subjecting himself to the chance of every punishment ever awarded by the criminal code ; but escaping from all in a manner as marvellous as unjust.

Mr. Skittler had appeared, all this time, on such good terms with his quarters, that he did not appear inclined to leave them ; but had been invited to sup with the Albino and her husband ; and had also paid great attention to Luddy's widow and Patsy.

"And so you want to learn dancing in the regular style," he said, to the latter, "and give up the stilts ? Well, I don't know ; but I should have thought the stilts best. Any body can dance without them."

"Oh no!" said the girl ; "anything but the streets. I should like the theatre—the lights, and beautiful music, and the company!" and she clasped her hands together with much enthusiasm. "I would give all I have got in the world to dance, even as well as that girl did on the show ! I am to learn, mother, properly—am I not ? You said I should if ever we came to great London."

"We will see, Patsy," replied the woman ; "there is plenty of time yet."

"No, mother, there is not!" replied the girl. "One should be young, and strong, and—and a good figure." She hesitated an instant, for the words "good-looking" were on her tongue ; but she checked them, although she brushed back her bright hair from her forehead with her hands, as she spoke. "And see," she continued, "how much more money I could get. You need not weary about the

muddy streets with me; and Hickory and Joe could do something else; and you could come to the theatre, and hear what they said of me. I am sure I should do."

"So am I," said Skittler, who had been looking at her most admiringly as she spoke. "And I know the gentleman as can teach you. I dare say you never heard of Professor Fandango?"

Patsy never had.

"Ah! well, you soon shall," said Skittler. "He knows a wonderful lot of dances—fifty different hornpipe steps, if he knows one: and teaches all Lambeth."

"Could he teach you what they want at the theatres?" asked the girl, anxiously.

"Oh! bless you; that's his line above all others," said Skittler. "If you'd seen him at the party I did, you'd know it. He's got a daughter can get both her feet higher than her head."

Patsy did not care to do that, particularly.

"And was a Harlequin, once, himself," continued Skittler; "only at last he got too fat to go through clocks and chemists' bottles, so he took to teaching. His name isn't Fandango, though—it's Potty."

"And why does he call himself Fandango, then?"

"For the sake of being a foreigner, of course," said Skittler. "No man gets profits from his own country, as Mr. Chirpey says. You'll have to change your name, if you want to make a hit."

"Isn't Skittler your name, then?" asked Patsy.

"Rather!" replied her friend. "I should just like to meet any body who said it wasn't. But then, you see, I sell things—I'm not the attraction myself. People believes in English trading, but not in English talents. I was obliged to call my cart the Tagglony though; if it had been the John Bull they wouldn't have come nigh it. They talks a good deal about him, too; but it's all talk. The minute their pockets or their tastes is touched, they don't care for him no more than if he was a swindler, or a blackamoor."

In the end, Skittler promised that Patsy should begin her education under the experienced tuition of Professor Fandango the next morning. And then, as the inmates had finished their cookery, the party fell to, to supper—Hickory and his little company being entertained by the hospitality of those they had come amongst, in the manner of the wandering tribes generally.

The Wild Indian was, as we have said, a remarkably quiet person; and he divided his time between eating his porridge, and finishing an ornament of threaded tobacco-pipes, which were to add to the attractions of his dress. But it would not have been clearly apparent to a disinterested observer, what tribe of the earth he was intended to belong to; for the different summer fashions of the Caffre, the Nigger, the North American, and the old original savage—the vague "wild man" of the story-books—were equally adopted in his costume. We say: summer fashions, since that appeared to be the period of the year most in accordance with his apparel. Without doubt, he would have followed the New Zealand style of dress with the greatest truth, had it been

thought the most effective ; but as this is exceedingly simple,—in fact consisting merely, under ordinary circumstances, of a ring in the nose and a feather in the head,—visitors whose minds had not been expanded, and whose prejudices had not been altogether overcome by travel, might have raised objections to so primæval a style. After all we think people believe more in artificial savages than in real ones. We do ourselves.

They were all busy at their meal, when the host of the public-house, Mr. Mawley, joined them ; the greater part of his company having departed.

"I hope you weren't annoyed at the young gent's liberties," he said, to Patsy : "he didn't mean anything rude, I'm sure."

Patsy coloured, as she hoped he wouldn't say anything more about it.

"I'd have told him he was doing wrong, but it wouldn't have done for me to offend him," continued Mawley. "He's a capital customer, and very free with his money."

"Who is he?" asked Hickory.

"Oh! a Baronet—a real down-right Baronet : no mistake about that. His father died five or six years ago ; and he won't be governed by anybody. He's a little fast, to be sure, and shies over the traces now and then. But he'll be all right one of these days."

They all got very friendly ; and as bed-time arrived, one or two of the men went out to look after the horses pertaining to their different expeditions, who were stabled in an old shed adjoining the building. Their feeding was not a heavy process : they were used to so little, that, like the horse of the economical foreigner, they had almost learned to do without any ; picking up precarious meals, when on their travels, in forbidden fields, by sandy road-sides, and from verdant hedge-rows. There were donkeys, also, in the stables ; who, when the caravan was considered, or rather practically proved, to be too much for one horse to draw, were tied to the shafts by the old cords used in the days of their power to pull up the pictures ; and arriving at the place of halt, were sent adrift, with chopping-blocks chained to their fore-legs, to extract as much nourishment as donkeys only are capable of getting, from newly-gravelled roads, hurdle-fences, and heaps of macadamising flints. In this one respect donkeys resemble the remarkable plants that climb about old walls, real ruins, and those artificial heaps called, by courtesy, grottoes. They appear to flourish just as well upon stones, clinkers, and bottoms of broken bottles, as in fat pastures ; perhaps better, upon the whole.

At last, upon a signal from an old wooden clock without any hands, and with a flat iron tied to its cord for a weight, that wheezed and scrooped in the corner of the room, Mr. Mawley produced, from a lock-up box, a number of small pieces of candle-ends, of about half an inch in length, and gave them round to the different members of the community, who fixed them according to their tastes,—sticking them on forks, melting them on to oyster-shells, or wedging them into the necks of ginger-beer bottles ; for candlesticks there were none.

The women of the community took their little ends, which gave just so much chance of light as would enable them to get into bed, and no more, and went off to different rooms in the house. The male portion of the wonderful group appeared less particular about their places of repose. Not considering a bed in any way necessary to a night's rest, they disposed themselves upon the table and floor of the room, and on their boxes, where they slept soundly until morning.

The only one who made objection to his place of rest was the young Daniel Lambert, who found no spot unappropriated, except the boxes and lockers which contained the alligators and some boa-constrictors; and the latter, he knew, had not been treated to their periodical guinea-pigs, so that he was in fear his own sleek state might attract them. Inasmuch as having heard the marvellous stories, from behind his chintz curtain in the penetralia of the show he travelled in, which his master was accustomed to relate to the "servants and working people at threepence each," about the capacity of the reptile's throat—not only to swallow full-grown oxen, but also to bolt down a whole caravan, visitors and all, if driven to do so by famine—he did not choose to run the risk of becoming an example of the rules for the proper conduct of serpents in private life. But Skittler at length accommodated him to his satisfaction; and then left the lodging-house with Mr. Mawley, with which gentleman he had a private discourse and pipe,—going over certain sporting matters, with dark hints of unconquered bull-dogs to be got cheap, and mysterious allusions to Peckham Antelopes and Flying Bakers, ready to walk against anybody for anything as soon as the money was safe,—until the first blush of morning; which, compared with the roseate hue before alluded to, as poetically ascribed to Aurora's fingers, rather resembles, in London, the leaden tint of cholera.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GUDGE AND CHRISTOPHER ARE, FOR A TIME, FRIENDS.

"TRAVEL indeed!" observed Mr. Gudge with a contemptuous expression, a few mornings after their arrival at Venice, as he leant from the balcony of the *Albergo dell'Europa*, watching the black hearse-like boats shooting out from the bye-streets.

"Travel indeed!" echoed Mrs. Gudge, in the same tones; "and indeed, and indeed again, as far as that goes! Why can't people be left quietly in their houses? I'm sure I wish we'd never come to such a nasty, damp, stuck-up, tumble-down place as Venus."

"Well, here we are," said Mr. Gudge, in a voice of angry resignation; "and here we must be until the diligence can find places for us. Who's going to pay for soldiers to guard a posting carriage? And who's going to be robbed if they don't? Not me—yar!"

"I've been looking at the map in the hall," said Mrs. Gudge, "and

we're a great way from home: quite a slice off Europe. I wonder if we shall ever get back again to Eaton Place? G: we were happier at Coke Villa, when we never went beyond Margate."

"Bah!" said Gudge, "we must do it, you know; every body must. Nobody's thought anything of unless they put themselves to all manner of foreign inconveniences and uncomfortablenesses in bad hotels and dirty lodgings, at this time of the year. Only ten o'clock!" he said with a yawn, as he dragged out a large watch by a massive chain from his fob. "What are we to do to get through the day?"

"There's some churches we haven't seen, and some pictures to look at—so the book says," suggested Mrs. Gudge.

"Oh! I can't stand any more churches and pictures," said her husband. "We've seen nothing else ever since we've been in this confounded Italy. I'm as sick of seeing them as I am of hearing the bells. It always seems Passion Week. Ah! there they are—at it again."

And as he was speaking, the constant ringing broke out more fiercely than ever from the Campaniles.

"Let us go into that broad St. Mark's Place," said Mrs. Gudge, "if you won't see any more pictures. I shouldn't wonder if Punch is there."

"And if he is:" said Mr. Gudge, "we can see him at home at any time, and understand him. We can't here. The idea of making Punch talk that confounded outlandish cackle. It's absurd, you know—hideous. However, I don't mind; oh, dear! come along."

And dragging his wife with him, Mr. Gudge threaded several little waterside alleys, of the size and general appearance of that remarkable passage of tea-rooms which runs parallel to the river from the steam-boat pier to the Old Ship, at Greenwich, only rather dirtier; and at last emerged into the Piazza di S. Marco, which is like the arched part of Covent Garden continued all round the area, and the market cleared away.

"I call all this a failure," said Mr. Gudge; "a regular sell, as we say at home. And the heat's enough to choke one. Pheugh! I'd give any thing for a bottle of ginger-beer."

"Well, I suppose you can have it, G." replied his helpmate; "here's cafés enough all round." And she pronounced 'café' to rhyme with safe—"Go and ask."

"Oh, yes; it's all very well to say go and ask," answered Gudge. "Go and ask yourself, and see how you'd like it, to have a lot of grinning Turks and other fools, sniggering at you because they won't understand what you mean. Look there! there's an object."

He pointed to the entrance of one of the numerous cafés under the Piazza, at which one of the latest turbaned and bearded importations by the steamer from Trieste, was gravely smoking a pipe, worth walking over a new flint road in thin boots to look at, as he read a newspaper, in spectacles, and now and then shook out some *fleur d'orange* from a little bottle into a goblet of water.

"Now that oughtn't to be permitted, you know. It wouldn't any-

where else. That's a Turk, you know—a heathen—a man who lives in a state of infamous domestic life, and ought only to be allowed to sell rhubarb; and not even that, when there's a respectable chemist and druggist in the neighbourhood. Come along; I wonder what we shall see next?"

"There's a cool place to sit down, in the court of the palace," said Mrs. Gudge; "suppose we go there for a little while. It is perfectly baking here."

Mr. Gudge was quite resigned. If he had known where else to go, he would, as in duty bound, have opposed it. But as he did not, he walked into the court of the palace and sat down by a well.

"To think of people coming to see that flight of steps," he said; "coming all the way from England to see it, and calling it the Giant Staircase. What for, I should like to know? And that dirty twopenny post-looking hole in the wall—the Lion's Mouth. Why they must be all idiots."

"Perhaps there's something about them we don't know of, G." said Mrs. Gudge.

"Pshaw! what can there be to know in an old tumble-down flight of steps, and a slit in a stone? What can there be to know in anything—what is any thing—if you come to that? Just nothing."

The remark was so perfectly conclusive and unanswerable, that Mr. Gudge had it all to himself.

"They are a nasty sly, savage set," he continued, after a short pause. "Look at the arsenal we went to—the Arsenal! pooh! I should like them to see Woolwich. And see what a race of brutes they always were! Why, they used to put men's heads in helmets too large for them, and shut a rat up inside to gnaw them when it got hungry. And now they put you in beds too small, and fill the room with musqueters!"

"Ah, drat the musketeers!" said Mrs. Gudge.

"Oh! it's to make you ill, and stay," continued Gudge. "It's one of their best dodges—the Dodge of Venice you've read about."

And after perpetrating this grim joke, Mr. Gudge gave a dry short laugh, that rattled in his throat like a last year's walnut.

"The Bridge of Sighs, too," he went on, "which everybody said we must see. Why, there's one in Leadenhall Market that would cut up into half-a-dozen. It's all nonsense, you know! And then to hear them yesterday at dinner: I got quite mad. They talked of the railway, and said it would destroy the romance of Venice. The romance of fiddle-de-dee! What romance is there in having no fresh water, and living in houses built upon piles! There's hundreds of places at home where you could do the same thing, if you wanted romance. Look at the Penitentiary, or the Essex Marshes. Pooh! stuff!"

And Mr. Gudge again worked himself up to such a pitch of indignation, that what with the heat of the weather, and his own indignation, it is wonderful he didn't set his brains boiling, and go mad at once.

The attention of Mr. Gudge and his wife was here distracted, by the entrance of a party of sight-seekers into the court of the ducal palace, guided by Christopher. They were guests, whom the attorney at once

recognised as staying at the same hotel with himself; and the youth had been sent to guide them to St. Mark's. As soon as he had seen them safely up the steps—that Faliero's head once rolled down, and confided them to the care of some waiting *laquais de place*—he was returning to the Albergo dell' Europa, when his eye caught Mr. Gudge's; and he directly came towards him.

"I'm glad you are here," said Christopher; "for I wanted to speak to you. Might I be bold enough to say a word or two, alone?"

And he looked at Mrs. Gudge, as if he mistrusted her confidence; which the lady perceived.

"You can speak to Mr. Gudge before me," she said. "Of course there is nothing concerning him or his interests that he does not wish me to know. Nothing. You are very much mistaken if you think there is."

But although this was all said to Christopher, it was at Gudge. And it was said with such energy, that Mrs. Gudge's trimming of red poppies, and ivy-leaves, and gold hops, to which she had been ever partial, and which she brought from England to make an effect—according to the custom of weak tourists in general, instead of waiting to see what is worn abroad—that these ornaments, we say, trembled as though they had been the pipe-clay birds which quiver down the wires of the cunning machine in the hands of the ingenious hawk.

But the sarcasm appeared thrown away altogether. For Mr. Gudge rose from his stone seat, and simply recommended his lady to take a walk round "St. Mark's Place," and look at the shops, whilst he talked with Christopher.

"Yes, indeed," said she; "and see the things I saw yesterday; and shall see to-morrow, and every day, whilst I am in this nasty place. G., this treatment is unmanly—worse, it is brutal—in a foreign land, away from friends and home; and our child—our Joseph!"

"Pshaw!" returned Mr. Gudge; "don't bother. Joseph's all right: he ought to be; I pay enough to keep him so. And what the devil did you care about your friends at home? Nothing. You never asked them to come near you; or when they did, you only pecked at one another all the time. I'm engaged; I want to talk—upon business."

"Business!" said Mrs. Gudge, sliding out the word in a bitter sneer; "very important, I dare say. Oh! if I had known this years back! And since then to think that I harboured in my house, and clothed, and fed, a child that you took an interest in, and I knew nothing about. A viper that trod upon you! It makes my blood run cold."

And in her anger, which always increased in proportion to her inability to solve any mystery that her husband kept to himself—especially concerning Christopher—Mrs. Gudge, in her turn, worked herself up to such a pitch, that Mr. Gudge questioned the state of circulation she had attributed to her vital fluid. He even recommended her, but in coarse and common-place terms, to perform an appropriate marriage with the Adriatic, as soon as she liked. And then he seized Christopher by the arm—he did not take it, but grasped it with his

fingers—and pushed rather than led him away: leaving his lady swelling, and panting, and heaving, as the lava of a volcano might be supposed to get excited just before an eruption, if anybody had the hardihood to look down the crater after it.

They talked for some time, and very earnestly. Christopher was anxious, as he had stated, to return to England, and penetrate, if possible, the mystery that shrouded his early days. He told Gudge that his recollections were vivid of things that happened even when he was a mere infant. He spoke of his childhood in the salt-mine; of Hickory; and of the meeting with the attorney at Liverpool; and he finished by saying, that he was determined to know who his father was; that he appealed to Gudge for the last time, conscious that he was cognizant of every thing, to enlighten him; and that if he refused, he should leave for England as soon as possible.

It was well observed, and in a clever story, that when two men fence, and one is an expert swordsman and the other knows a little, the latter is sure to be beaten; but that when the other is perfectly ignorant of the art, he stands a chance of puzzling the better man, even to getting the victory with his own hands. The remark may apply to other affairs besides fencing. For if you encounter a Do, or Doo—we have no authority for the right spelling of the word, albeit it is now a popularly received one, as an abbreviation for a swindling humbug—and you try to outdo him, you are sure to fail, and be miserably worsted. But if you keep on a strictly open, straightforward course, you will as surely foil all his schemes as he would have done yours had you fancied yourself only half as knowing as he was.

And this was the case, in the present instance, with Christopher and Gudge. In vain the attorney pointed out, with great art, the advantages of his present position over a similar one in England; and reasoned with him on the peculiar circumstances that prevented him—Gudge—from satisfying the other's curiosity; but bidding him rest assured, at the same time, that he would eventually find all was for the best. Christopher was not to be drawn into any argument, to which conviction against his will would result. He simply adhered to his intention of going to England: so quietly, but with such determination, that Gudge found he was on a losing tack. So he went on another course.

He thought that if the youth did mean to return, it would be better for them to be friends than to be working against each other—at least for his purpose. And it also struck him, that by pretending to assist him, as far, he could say, as their peculiar positions admitted of his doing, he might be better able to throw obstacles in the way of his voyage of discovery. He also thought, that if Christopher should, by some unlucky chance, make any discoveries, it would be more advantageous to be on good terms with him. And a deeper and blacker notion than all rose in his mind, which we do not yet intend to promulgate.

These things took Mr. Gudge less time to think, than they have done

to read, about. They flashed upon his acute mind all at once, as the electric spark lights up every corner of the tin-foil ornament simultaneously; and with an equally vivid impression. So he gave in—not too readily though—to Christopher's way of thinking. And when they went back to Mrs. Gudge—who had, by looking at the sun, poking the ends of her gloves into her eyes, and smelling hard at some salts which she invariably carried with her, tried to make herself look as though she had been weeping,—by this time Gudge had agreed to take him back with them, not in any menial capacity, but as an accommodation, to London.

A few days afterwards, a good earnest easterly wind was blowing a large double gondola over the Lagunes to Fusina; and the same evening, Mr. and Mrs. Gudge, Christopher, and the two servants, were deposited safely at the chief hotel at Padua; "once more, thank their stars," as Mrs. Gudge observed, "upon solid ground;" for the whole time she had stopped at Venice, she had felt as though she had been upon the flying island of Laputa, come down by mistake upon the sea. Christopher refused every proffered attention. He was courteous to them, but no more; and constantly preferred riding outside the carriage—amongst the luggage, or on the box with the driver—to the seat that was as constantly offered to him in the interior. And thus going on, in two days they got to Milan; and in three more had passed the Simplon, and alighted at the Hotel de la Tour, at Martigny, in the Valais of Switzerland.

The inn in question is situated at the foot of the chain of hills which have their culminating point in the Great St. Bernard; and the road to the celebrated convent starts directly from the village. Hence it is usually tolerably full of visitors, and there is at times some difficulty in procuring a sufficiency of beds. This was the case upon the present occasion. The master of the hotel came out to the door, and anxious to accommodate the travellers in order that they might not go to another house, whilst, at the same time, he knew he had no room for them, was hesitating in his proceedings, when a feminine voice addressed him from the passage:

"Not any spare room!—Stop: I can have a nice bed made up on the sofa in the *salle à manger*, and the lady and gentleman can have mine. Go and tell them so."

A cry of despair burst from Mr. Gudge's lips, as he recognized the tones. He was turning to the driver to tell him to go on to the Hotel de la Poste, when the speaker appeared at the door. There was no mistake about her. It was Mrs. Hamper!

"My goodness," she exclaimed, not at all hurt at anything that had ever occurred; "how fortunate! My nephew is gone on to Chamouny, and I was wishing for somebody to join me in a *char-à-banc*; for I intend going up to the Convent of St. Bernard, to-morrow: and of all people in the world, you have arrived in time."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PATSY LOOKS FORWARD TO NEW EMPLOYMENT.

It was not only by the returns of "The Cock and Badger," that Mr. Nicholas Mawley, formerly known as the Pluckly Crusher, contrived to subsist. The curious inmates of the lodging-house adjoining the hostelry combined in no small degree, as workpeople, to build the fortune of which he was becoming the architect.

For he gained a large income by practising on the credulity of the public, at races and festivals, as a showman. Not that he harangued the public himself on these occasions: he had proper officers of bold address, and lungs of cast iron, india-rubber and agate, combined, to undertake this part of his profession. He provided the sights, and the means of displaying them; having first commenced in that line himself by keeping a small show and canvass tavern, for the exhibition of the noble art of self-defence, at the races. There was not a curiosity in England but he knew where to pitch upon it: indeed he had lived so long in communion with remarkable folks, that the every-day world might have been considered the greatest marvel he met with. He could treat with Circassian ladies, black wild Indians, and spotted boys. He knew the idiosyncrasies of Lancashire giants and little men: he had even some mysterious powers of concluding arrangements with clever pigs, banded armadillos, and mermaids; but with common mortals, except those moving entirely in the sporting world, he was at fault. And yet possibly, if he had studied them well, he would have found individuals amongst them, of ordinary appearance, quite as singular as the most wonderful of his wonders.

Not only to shows, however, was his enterprize confined. Every thing by which a penny could be turned, at the fair or on the race-course, became an object of his attention. The same waggon that bore the frame-work of his drinking booth, carried the round-about and swing to be erected under its lee. At such times, too, he would start his emissaries, each with two shillings' worth of nuts, a target, and a percussion-cap gun, to increase their store one hundred fold. He let out lucky bags and knock 'em-downs to the tramps; and, somewhere, on premises apart from the bull-dogs and tiger cat, had a loft inhabited entirely by Punches, puppet-jugglers, skeletons who tumbled to pieces, and fantoccini scaramouches.

In Skittler, who might be considered his minister of minor impositions, Mr. Mawley found one of his ablest assistants: and when they met again on the morning after the introduction of Patsy and Hickory to the lodging-house, there was much for him to do. For apart from general business, whenever quarrels arose amongst the inmates of the lodging-house—when the Albino girl would rather go with her husband, than allow him to travel with Miss Haines, who could lift unknown weights with her back hair, and practically prove

how the old English law-givers were taken in, when they considered a promenade over red hot ploughshares with impunity a test of innocence, by exhibiting her own indifference to any degree of caloric, free or latent, on glowing pokers and flat irons—when the Albino girl would not travel with Miss Haines, because she was reported to have been an early flame of the Black Wild Indian, before he went abroad and got tattooed in the bush; under these circumstances Skittler was appealed to, and his word was considered law.

The inmates of the lodging-house were early people; and all was bustle in that region of wonders, with the morning. The Bounding Brothers of Olympus were already in their costumes of display—ochre-coloured tight shape dresses, lace-up boots, and spangled red-leather braces: for they were accustomed to perform along the road, and were collecting their properties, which consisted chiefly of a wooden chair, four feet of ragged stair-carpet, and two balls tied to the end of a rope to clear a circle. The ladder, the donkey and the coach-wheel, being only exhibited at fairs went in the caravans. When they had collected together, they put on their old great coats over their finery and started, followed some distance by the boys who had collected round the gate of the yard, and now accompanied them in the anticipation of some speedy exhibition.

"Well—and how have you slept?" said Skittler, as Patsy appeared in the common room, fresh and rosy from a recent immersion in cold water.

"Oh—so well!" replied the young girl. "And dreamt all night long that I was at the theatre—and that the girl was there too, who was outside the show—and that I danced better than she did, and had all the money thrown to me."

"Ah—very good," said Skittler; "but they don't throw money at you, in the theaytres, you know. Nosegays though—lots of nosegays: buckets they call them."

"Yes?" said the girl eagerly; "and real flowers?"

"Oh! every one—all a blowing and a growing as the saying is. They do them up cheap, and tie them up strong a purpose. I'll tell you where to get them, when the time comes."

"I to get them. I thought you said they were given to me."

"They're supposed to be," said Skittler, "but they ain't. No—I haven't lived about Coven' Garding for nothink. If you don't send nosegays, directed to yourself, to stage-doors and get your friends to pitch them at you at night, you won't make much of a hit. I know a foreign lady as danced, that dealt in the Market, and wouldn't move a leg before the manager agreed to throw her six nosegays a night; and one time he only threw five, so she cut him for good."

The conversation ended in Skittler promising to introduce Patsy to Professor Pandango, who had been the preceptor of half the fairies and *resières* then inhabiting the realms of theatrical enchantment. And telling Hickory, and her mother, that he would take great care of her, he persuaded them to give up the streets, for that day, and commit her to his protection.

They went a long way, but Skittler made the journey very entertaining by his remarks on men and things generally; interchanging recognitions all the way with such wandering merchants as he encountered. For he knew them all. First there was the old gentleman, who had seen better days, in the clean high shirt-collar, and white cotton gloves with no tops to the fingers, who stood with a stock in trade of one box of lucifers, on the kerb before the gin-shop, and would have been worth any money as a funeral mute, only his present trade paid better. Then there was the real unhappy family who sat in the gutter opposite the baker's, in picturesque attitudes after Chantrey; and the wandering artist who drew a mackarel on the pavement, and wrote over it "Hunger compels" or "I am starving"; and the purveyors of kidney puddings, and pickled whelks, and other unholy shell-fish. He also knew the pastoral trader who blew a bird-whistle the whole of the live-long day, in a cup of water, chirping all the third-floor larks and bull-finches out of countenance; and the cunning artists who were great in corn-salve, diamond cement, and knobs of costly composition that turned half-pence into half-crowns in no time—so quickly indeed that you could never pass them. And then he came to a man who had a long barrow of everything; with whom he stopped for a little talk.

"How are you doing, old man?" he asked of the merchant, who kept a stall of singular variety—plates, egg-cups, jumping frogs, climbing monkeys, whips, whistles, lucifers, balls, cuckoos, scaramouches, shells, mugs, pin-cushions, wooden lemons and rattles. "How's trade?"

"Might be better," said the man. "All the pitches for catching customers is gradually being done up. They make the passages into streets, and the courts into squares; and then there's no draughts of wind to fly the painted-bird alphabets."

"Nor the Histories of England neither," said Skittler. "Them Kings don't look very lively—do 'em?"

"No: hangs down as melancholy as a bunch of tailor's measures in a trimming shop," said the merchant, as he gave the line of the Royal Family of Great Britain an undignified motion, by shaking the tall stick from which they depended.

"Ah!" replied Skittler: "so they do. I'd take to bull's-eyes if I was you. I think of doing so myself. Something in the new style. It must pay you know. For the bull's-eye shops are always open the latest of all; and more new ones start up every day. The old fashion won't do though with the young things, now."

He was so far right. The places of the old bull's-eyes in the juvenile affections had long been occupied by the more novel and flaunting sweetmeats of more active establishments, at which the school of saccharine design had run mad from too much invention. For now there were oyster-shells, candle-ends, and onions, all in sugar; radishes, rashers of bacon, and legs of mutton: courtly compounds of Albert rock and Victoria toffee, upon which the Queen and her consort, without doubt, lived entirely—at least so thought the children. And what chance could the peppermint buttons and dull bull's-eyes—of shapes

that came under no geometrical definition—have against these? The brandy-balls had struggled long for custom during this transition from the middle age to the florid school of design; but, at last, the buyers ceased to believe in the presence of brandy; and they were forgotten accordingly.

Patsy wondered at all she heard; but evidently looked upon Skittler as a great authority in every thing, and wondered at his unlimited connexions. For when he left the barrow, before a minute had passed, he had a chat with the Sphinx, in a fustian jacket and highlows, who addressed conundrums to the world in general, on one side of the street; and the Œdipus, in velvet, on the other side, who answered them. And then he had a friendly pugilistic encounter—in the manner of cads, who loiter about coach-offices, sparring and knocking one another's hats off, and upsetting orderly passengers—with an intimate acquaintance in a shiny hat and corduroys, who dealt in cutlery at the 'Elephant', and cut his gloves into flakes all day long to prove the edge of his celebrated flexible-bladed penknives. If any one besides Patsy had watched him, they would have seen that just in the same manner as the members of the high world know each other, and can fix the links by which the chains of its large society are kept together, so is there the same communion amongst the lowest, the most abject, and apparently friendless of those who form the mere pipkins of that great clay factory in which the others are the porcelain.

Skittler and his fair young charge went on, through labyrinths of suburban streets, and regions of fireworks, ladder manufactories and anomalous yards, and wharfs, and paled-in plots of ground; until at last they stopped at the door of a house, so different in its appearance from those adjoining it, that it was well calculated to arrest the attention of the passengers.

The Temple of Terpsichore, which had been raised by Professor Fandango to his patron muse, looked as if it had been built of Bristol board adorned with gold strips, so white and costly was its appearance. On the door was a brass plate inscribed "Fandango's Dancing Academy" and this was so bright that it almost took the eyes out of any body's head when looking at it in the sunlight. Above the windows were emblematical devices,—groups of pandæan pipes, post-horns, and tambourines, which according to the notion of the ancients formed a complete band: and on either side of the door were boards with startling announcements of evening classes, balls, and private tuition, all going on within. There was a lamp over the door on which the professor's name and calling was repeated, surrounded by a wreath of laurel; and this was contrived to illuminate the fan-light, and light the hall at the same time. When the door was open, passers by of ordinary minds were awed into speechless attention, at seeing the elegant company on ball nights unshawling in the passage, or putting off their boots of vulgar life for the academical pumps, in corners; and also at catching glimpses of festooned flowers, stretching from the sconces against the walls to look festive—wreaths of pink and white calico roses, only seen on such occasions, or in theatres: and twinkling

illumination lamps. For real wreaths and festoons are things we do not believe in; and nothing would more painfully distress us, than being ordered to weave a chaplet of wild flowers for the brows of any beloved one. The poets, we believe, are in the secret of the manufacture; but the poets are extraordinary people. We should not have the feeblest notion of how to set about it; nor even, if accomplished, do we put great faith in the effect. Chains, to be sure, formed of cowslips, have been produced by children, but the patience displayed in their production was more remarkable than their design or tenuity when made: or necklaces of daisies have completed the set of floral fabrics. But festoons and wreaths live only in gifted imaginations, and would puzzle all the central avenue of Covent Garden to produce if ordered.

But though Professor Fandango lived there in a species of domestic fairy land, his was not altogether a bed of roses. For on the occasions of his grand parties, wicked boys without would salute the company as they arrived with rude remarks, and loud opinions on their costumes and personal appearance; and young men of ill-regulated habits would carry away his boards and hang them on the chapel railings further on; or bring back the advice relative to the keys of the engine-house and the interment of deceased friends, to take their place. And they delighted on drawing the Professor out, to run after them. For then some impish boy, with no fear of mud, would lure him into the road and through insidious puddles, to the great detriment of his tights and shoe-strings, and marked injury to the white glazed calico lining of his coat-tails; whilst other boys, equally fiendish and unprincipled, would take advantage of the open door to bolt across the passage, put their heads into the ball-room and shout "Fire!" and then rush back again, generally encountering the Professor, and upsetting him on his own door sill. On these occasions he received no aid from his neighbours. On the contrary, they silently abetted the marauders, not in any way interfering, since, three times a week the quadrille music disturbed their rest until day-break, grumbling in that unsatisfactory manner which characterizes a band played in the next street but one, in which the double bass and trombone have it all to themselves.

The Professor did not receive Skittler in good spirits. It was evident that his mind was weighed down by sadness; and whilst Patsy was wondering at the day-light gaiety of the assembly room, he unbosomed himself:

"It's no use," he said, "going on this way. If the profession is to be supported we must have another new dance. You wouldn't believe it; but last night every soul in this room knew every figure. And the worst of it is, I can't get any they don't."

"I'll be bound they're not up to the double-shuffle," said Skittler.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Professor, "a new step! Which is it?"

Skittler was very obliging: he got up in an instant to enlighten the other, and went through the *pas*. It was performed without quitting the spot on which he stood, and consisted in a rapid drumming of the toe and heel of the right foot upon the ground, whilst the left beat graver time: and this he continued, with marvellous powers of endurance and imperturbable gravity of expression, until the professor begged of him to stop.

"What did you call that?" he said.

"The double shuffle," replied the other.

"Yes—double shuffle: um—I do not like the name. I think the Bohemian Quick-step would sound better. Once more if you please."

Upon which Skittler repeated it, and before a minute was over the Professor faced him, and began to dance it too, readily catching the step, until the double performance became so irresistibly ludicrous, that Patsy could not refrain from laughing when they ceased.

"Ah!" exclaimed the professor in breathless accents as he came to a pause: "that is a joyous smile for the foot-lights. If you had been a little younger—but no matter: my daughter never began the Fandango Olio until she was sixteen. She could mark her height though with her foot on the wainscot when she was ten, and do the Circassian Waltz almost before she could run alone. Never mind: we shall see."

It was finally arranged that Patsy should be with the Professor for six months, beginning immediately as an 'extra' at one of the theatres, and devoting an hour every day to the mysteries of tuition. For this she was not to pay anything—and indeed such a process might have considerably inconvenienced her little party—but M. Fandango was to receive, by way of remuneration, whatever sums she was paid in that period as salary.

In the interim the Professor insisted upon her giving up her street performances: for he said it was a bad school of dancing most popular in such circumstances. Inasmuch as when the pandæan pipes failed, for want of breath in the performer, the drum beat time in too hurried a manner to allow of much grace or finish in the *pas*: and the habit of kissing hands to the first floor windows as the dancer whirled round upon one leg was not an effective one. The limits of the old board too, upon which the exhibition took place induced a crippled action and want of boldness.

When all things were arranged, Skittler once more took Patsy with him and accompanied her back to the lodging house, as proud, as the Professor remarked, as if he had cut six, and turned round twice in the air. For the beauty of the girl—even clothed as she was in her shabby weather-blanchéd wardrobe—attracted general notice. Anybody might have looked for a long time, and with the best spectacles if he was short-sighted, all about the world—nay, he might have used one of those wonderful glasses that "see about eight miles," through houses, and round corners, and behind hills for aught we know, before he had found anything so agreeable to gaze upon.

Patsy had quite enough to occupy her thoughts all the way home—indeed she was surprised when she got there. And then she had a great deal to tell her mother, and Hickory;—who, finding that her assistance would be no longer available in the street exhibitions, began to think what attraction could be devised in her place. And having gone over dancing dogs, performing monkeys, and fantoccini: Punch, comic singing and gymnastics, they at last decided upon conjuring.



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Theatrical Scene

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE ASCENT OF THE GREAT ST. BERNARD.

THE perfect absence of pride in Mrs. Hamper's composition rendered it impossible for any body to quarrel with her. People frequently tried to do so but never succeeded, for she would not be affronted; in fact she followed out great Christian principles to such an extent, that at times she became a perfect martyr to social insults.

And so that good lady forgot all her Venetian slights, with the dangers subsequently undergone, resulting therefrom; and left at the inn by her nephew, who had positively refused to allow her to accompany him in his ascent of Mont-Blanc, was delighted to see her old friends arrive. Mr. Gudge had already called up a glance expressive of a wish to do Mrs. Hamper some mild, but mortal, injury; and his wife, was looking hard in another direction, where there was nothing but a mountain covered two parts down with a mist to be seen; waiting for the cue from her husband as to what course she should pursue. But their intended severity was of no avail. Mrs. Hamper's warmth of reception was absolutely oppressive: and before they knew where they were, she had talked them into the *salle-à-manger*, given up her bed, secured the sofa, and ordered supper.

"Dear! dear! dear!" she said, "how very lucky! To think of all things in the world of meeting with you again. And just as I was going up the St. Bernard! You are going of course?"

"Eh?" asked Mr. Gudge; "going up where? How much? What is it?"

"Ah—how much indeed," said Mrs. Hamper; "that's the very thing; we can arrange it so well together. A *char-à-banc* will be a mere nothing for two; and you can walk. Shall we ring the man up and ask him. You'll be delighted with him—a nice steady man, and very reasonable I can assure you!"

"But what is all this about?" asked Gudge.

"Oh—the great St. Bernard," replied Mrs. Hamper.

"Yes—you know, G. The great St. Bernard," added Mrs. Gudge, who had got some hazy notion of it in the Handbook she had been studying on the road. "Bonyparty you know, and the dogs. Surely you recollect the St. Bernard dogs: you remember Turk?"

"I ought to," said Gudge; "he was all I got for a bill, and nearly ruined me. He taught me something though: if ever you want to be savagely revenged upon anybody give them a large dog. I did once, to an opposing creditor; and ruined him."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Hamper: "did you ever have a St. Bernard dog?"

"I rather think I did," returned Gudge; "one as big as a calf. He used to walk under all the tables and hoist them up; and dig pit-

holes in the lawn to lie down in until the garden looked like a cemetery. He killed all the little dogs he met by falling down upon them, and they used to be found like mats, quite flat: and fought all the great ones until they ran away in strips. He bit all the men, knocked over all the old ladies, and bolted with the best joints from the butchers: until I paid more for him than for my family."

"Bless me!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamper; "and didn't you part with him?"

"Not till he had killed so many babies, that the parents began to make a noise about it;" answered Mr. Gudge. "So I gave him away, as I have told you. I'd a long secret grudge against a man, but he thought it had been all set to rights. I made him swear he would never part with Turk, as he was a great favorite; and he never did, until the dog brought him to the Bench, and finally, somehow or another, transported him. I forget how, but the dog did it. He! he! he!"

The party were speculating upon the pleasures of retribution, when the subject of conversation was diverted by the entrance of Christopher, who had been strolling up and down in front of the hotel until he found the *salle-à-manger* was the only general room.

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Hamper, as the youth entered. "I almost thought it was my nephew, Edward, who went to Chamouny yesterday. Why, where have I seen this young gentleman before?"

"Venice," said Mr. Gudge quickly. "Hey, day! Christopher; I thought you were lost. Where have you been, my man?"

Mrs. Gudge looked very indignant.

"Watching the travellers posting by," said Christopher. "They say we can get to Geneva in a long day by taking the steamer, near Chillon."

"Ah! Chillon!" gushed forth Mrs. Hamper. "We must see that too! The dungeon in which Byron passed so many hapless years;

'There are seven pillows all over mould'

you know he says:—and let me think—what else?—oh!

'My hair is grey, but not with fright
But all turned white in a single night.'

Beautiful!"

And here Mrs. Hamper looked up to the ceiling, and did the enthusiastic.

"How came it white?" asked Mrs. Gudge; "What a curious mistake! But I never believed in them sudden dyes. If you sit in the sun the blacks are all puce. No, give me a front."

It was evident, that from the mention of damaged pillows and hair, Mrs. Gudge was thinking wildly of some process for changing the tint.

"Oh—you must have read the 'Prisoner of Chillon'," said Mrs. Hamper.

"Never, that I know of," replied Mrs. Gudge.

"But you *must*; and forgotten it: it's sublime; and when he's tied to the horse's back, and run away with; and the wolves!—magnificent."

"Oh,—that's Ashley's," said Mr. Gudge; "now I know what you mean. Do you want us to go there to-morrow? Are we near the original place?"

"No," returned Mrs. Hamper; "we are going to the Convent to-morrow, you know."

"And the monks," added Mrs. Gudge. "I never saw a real monk. I had one that shewed whether it was going to rain on the mantel-piece at Brompton."

"Pshaw! pooh! stuff!" observed Gudge. "It only told you it had rained, when it was over: they're all alike."

"Well, never mind, G., that's not the point. It's the only monk I know, except the crockery one we had that put out the candle; and in the old washed-out percession at Vauxhall. Ah! I should like to see some real ones."

"Then I had better look about the *char-à-banc* at once?" suggested Mrs. Hamper.

"Oh,—I think so," replied the other lady: but not having the slightest idea as to whether the article named was any thing to eat, or to wear, or some peculiar kind of passport.

It was at last however finally settled, that the two ladies should start the next morning in the mountain-vehicle spoken of; which, it was calculated they would completely fill, more especially on an up-hill road. Mr. Gudge agreed to walk, and persuaded Christopher to accompany him, to keep him from crossing the hills to Chamouny, where he appeared to have some wish to go, Mr. Gudge not desiring that he should fall in with young Ellis; which would most probably be the case. The arrival of some more travellers put a stop to individual conversation; and the attorney and his wife withdrew to Mrs. Hamper's room, whilst that lady made herself generally communicative to every body in the room until the guests departed for the night. And then she took possession of the sofa, and slept calmly upon the chance thus afforded of deducting some little sum from the hotel bill when it came to be presented.

The next morning, as six o'clock sounded for the second time,—for most of the clocks of the mountain churches in Switzerland strike the hour twice,—Mrs. Hamper was up again; and a breakfast of honey, coffee, bread, cheese, and wine was on the table, at which Mr. and Mrs. Gudge, with Christopher were soon assembled. Presently, an untuned ginging of dull bells announced the arrival of the *char-à-banc*; and Mr. Gudge went to the window to look at it. As the most comical of all the wild vehicles one sees on the continent, we may inspect it as well. Most of the roads to the Swiss "show places," being very narrow and rugged, are impracticable for large or common carriages; hence a lighter and smaller vehicle is required, and the *char-à-banc* is the one chosen.

The receipt to make one is this. First, take a small four-wheeled

truck, without springs, and where strength is required more than ease. Then get the broadest gig body you can find, and place it on the afore-said truck, not with its face forward, however, but sideways, in the manner of half an Irish outside jaunting car. Next set up four posts on the body, and place some leather curtains over and around it, leaving one side open, and you have the vehicle complete: to which you may attach one or two mules as occasion may require; and then travel crab-fashion wherever you like. We say wherever you like; for we have a private opinion of our own, that there are few places, except the wall of a house, which a *char-à-banc* would not venture to ascend. It must not be regarded as a carriage, but as some species of fairy car, endowed with locomotion by the gnomes of the Alps. It looks unnatural and ill at ease upon a smooth road; but put it on a mountain pass, rough with blocks of granite and the *débris* of an avalanche, and the *char-à-banc* jolts, and bumps, and travels gaily on, seeming to revel in its difficulties. It would be the only vehicle that could traverse a street taken up for re-paving. It could cross the deepest railway cuttings or the highest embankments with great ease, rendering all formation of bridges or tunnels superfluous; and might, therefore, with great advantage be introduced into England.

Into such a vehicle did Mrs. Hamper and Mrs. Gudge, with some difficulty, stow themselves; but not until they were thoroughly assured that the driver was the steady man he had been said to be, and the mules beyond reproach. And thus they started off, with a body guard of Mr. Gudge and Christopher; and followed by a small mob of the juvenile natives, who collected in shoals from the houses and fields as the car went along, shouting all in a breath, and all at once, "*Bon jour, madame* (or *monsieur*, as the case might be) *donnez-moi que'que chose*," with the perseverance of the imps who cry, "Please, sir, give a poor boy a ha'penny," as you come from the races. If the travellers did not comply with this rather indefinite request, a shower of bits of granite followed them as soon as their backs were turned; and Mr. Gudge only provoked fresh missiles by shaking his umbrella at the enemy. They would even approach and shout "Goddam!" and then thinking that they had annihilated the travellers by some crushing sarcasm, run away shouting. English oaths had become bye-words even in the gorges of the great St. Bernard.

There was not much excitement, beyond this, during the early part of the journey. For after the travellers had passed the church, and a few miserable pigsty-looking tenements, inhabited apparently by idiots only, with large 'goitres' hanging from their necks, the route for two or three miles, had little to interest beyond the common characteristics of Swiss mountain-passes: which may be comprised in a deep, narrow valley, with overhanging granite rocks on each side, and a rapid stream tumbling and roaring through the middle, by the side of which, and sometimes crossing it, is the road.

"Well," said Mr. Gudge, after they had walked for an hour or two, "are we getting near the place?"

"Lord, G. ! no," was the reply of his lady ; " the book says it's ten leagues."

"Ten devils !" cried Mr. Gudge. "What! do you mean to say we've got thirty miles of this never-ending Highgate Hill sort of toiling, to see an old house in some snow, and some dirty dogs and monks. Oh, I shan't go on !"

"Your bosom care seems of different opinion," said Mrs. Gudge, pointing to Christopher, who was sauntering on a-head. "Of course we are not good enough for him—a waiter, indeed! Well, thank goodness, I have pride."

"Charming view," observed Mrs. Hamper, vaguely, who, fearful the quarrel would end in their turning back, and that she would never get to St. Bernard, endeavoured to make everything delightful.

"Well, I must confess I haven't seen much yet," replied Mrs. Gudge, whom the sight of Christopher, and the undeveloped mystery concerning him, never failed to put in the humour of contradicting everybody, "I hope it will be something more than this."

The hope was not an extravagant one, for as their car went sideways, with its back to the valley, they could see nothing but the high, black rocks close to the road.

"But then we can say we have been, you know," said Mrs. Hamper, soothingly, "and that is the greatest pleasure of travelling."

"Yar!" answered Gudge; "*say!* yes, of course, we can *say*: and so we could if we hadn't been near it. What's to hinder my saying I've been in Nova Scotia if I choose, or up in a balloon, or down in a diving-bell—nothing or nobody. Get on!"

The last words were addressed to the near mule, whom Mr. Gudge, wishing to find an outlet for his irritability, banged with his mountain pole, and then strode on to Christopher. Mrs. Hamper directly applied herself to soothe Mrs. Gudge, by telling her long stories of great people, to all of whom she promised, one of these days, to present her: and this, in a measure, had the effect. Christopher and Gudge marched on at the head of the party, neither being very communicative; and in this order they went on, until they came about the middle of the day to the Col de Ferret inn, at Orsières,—a village at a tolerable elevation up the mountain, where they stopped to lunch. This was, in a measure, a fortunate halt; for it began to rain. Had this occurred whilst they were out, there is no knowing what pitch Mr. Gudge's anger would have arrived at. But as all the party were hungry, the meal that was in a very short time placed before them, served to put them all in tolerable good temper. Mrs. Hamper was especially cheerful; for she had found out, a few miles lower down, that—the most annoying circumstance in the world—she had left her purse on the mantel-piece of the *salle-à-manger* at Martigny, whence it would be sure to be stolen by some of the dishonest foreigners. Consequently she knew it was impossible for her to pay, then, for any thing; whatever she might be called upon to do hereafter; and this greatly rejoiced her, and added to her appetite in no inconsiderable degree.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE STORM : AND HOW GUDGE AND CHRISTOPHER FARED IN THE
GOUFFRE DU DIABLE.

EGGS and cutlets form the staple refreshments all up the Great St. Bernard ; for fowls and sheep appear to grow spontaneously about the villages in company with fir-trees, cabbages, and granite rocks. But they beat us out of the kitchen in their manner of cooking the eggs,—a plan, by the way, quite continental, and which, at the risk of trespassing on M. Soyer's province, we will explain. In the common way of poaching eggs, there are two evils. If you boil them simply in water, the albumen coagulates into a mass of rags and shreds, which waste a third of its substance ; if you stand them in cups in a water-bath, they are very pretty, to be sure, looking out from their spinach bed like so many eyes ; but the under part is as hard as cheese, whilst the top is still glairy and transparent. So our neighbours get a plate they don't care much about, and having buttered it, break the eggs on to it, and put it over the fire. They are soon cooked ; and with a richness and flavour that alone belongs to them in this state. Then they sprinkle salt and pepper over them—for cast-iron English stomachs a little cayenne may be added with effect—and, set burning hot before you with your *œufs sur le plat*, you have a dish that Heliogabalus might have gormandized upon.

Mr. Gudge found them very good feeding ; and what with some excellent wine, and several small affairs of brandy, got so sunshiny himself as the rain held up, that he found something very fine in the prospect from the window, and declared his intention of remaining to enjoy it,—adding, that the women might go on if they chose. Neither Mrs. Gudge nor Mrs. Hamper were averse to the proceeding, as the gentleman's bearing had not in any way, up to the present time, tended to make the journey especially agreeable ; and Christopher, not being a favourite, did not see any inducement to accompany them, so he waited behind as well. And then a relay of mules began to draw the ladies up the increasing steepness of the pass as they best might ; whilst Mr. Gudge, having waited in the contemplation of nature as long as he thought proper, at length followed them, with Christopher.

The road now became exceedingly picturesque ; for the ascent of the Great St. Bernard does not lie all the way amongst those regions of snow and dreariness in which we are acquainted with Napoleon, prancing in the wind upon a horse of astonishing spirit, considering the work he has gone through. Grape-vines were clinging to the sides of the mountains, which were dotted here and there with chalets in a most effective manner. The weather too was beginning to clear up ; and the charm of the scenery was increased by numerous little waterfalls, which owed their birth to the late rain, and were tumbling merrily down the

steeps, and wandering through the meadows until they reached the river.

"I shall sit down here and be jolly," said Mr. Gudge, as he came to a turn of the road. "What's the use of working in this way?—I wouldn't do it at home you know. Sit down too. There's a view. There's nothing like brandy to make you enjoy scenery."

Albeit Mr. Gudge's perception of the beautiful was, as Christopher could plainly see, sharpened by the indulgences of the table, the scene was one that might have called for the admiration of any body. A noble valley opened on their right, in the depths of which could be seen the handsome village of Dranse. Before, and far below them, a long chain of rich pastures spread as far as the eye could reach; gradually merging from the lovely green of the valley, many hundred feet beneath, into the reddish brown of the mountain, and finally crowned by its summit of dark shrubs. The impetuous Dranse, which, bursting its bounds three hundred years ago, swept away an entire village, was flowing through the bottom of the valley, like a line of white thread upon bright green velvet, mingling its distant roar with the cattle bells in the meadows. And this music is one of the most charming accompaniments to Alpine scenery. On the mountains each animal has a bell attached to its neck: and the effect of many thousands of these, with their mellow tones gradually softening in the distance, with the occasional *Ranz des Vaches* of the cow-boy's horn,—not altogether such a note as Kœnig would play, but still a lusty and well-sustained one,—is indescribably beautiful. High up on their left the mighty St. Bernard was rearing his crown of eternal snow; and the path they were to follow could be traced until it became a mere line, running in a zigzag direction up the mountain.

Mr. Gudge sat for a little time, looking at the scene with fishy eyes and parted lips, and at last observed to Christopher:—

"It's very great, you know; nothing like it that ever was. But it's the man, you see; if the heart's in the right place. That's what I say: the heart, Sir,—the heart."

"Have you got a heart?" asked Christopher, upon whom Mr. Gudge's winey sympathies did not make a very great impression, beyond one of contempt.

Mr. Gudge stared at him for an instant, not knowing exactly how to take the inquiry; and then he replied solemnly:

"Yes; I've a heart that can beat for another. Here—no, not that side—here's my heart."

"I should think so," said Christopher, as Mr. Gudge, somewhat hazy in his anatomical knowledge, first put his hand on his right side, and then on his stomach. But the sarcasm was lost upon him.

"When you see the beauties of nature," continued Mr. Gudge impressively, seizing hold of Christopher's arm, "you ought to thank Heaven you're no better than you should be; whilst so many poor creatures beg their bread from door to door."

"I have not to thank you much for what I am," said Christopher, somewhat sullenly.

"Yes, you have,—every thing ; but you don't know it, nor what I'm going to do for you."

"What is it?" asked Christopher eagerly, thinking that Mr. Gudge might give him some clue to the mystery. But, even in his cups, the attorney was too deep for that.

"Nothing," he replied, shaking his head,—“nothing that's either here nor there, until the time comes. And come it will, one of these days, as everything else does, if you wait for it,—postmen, bills, or fire-engines. That's what I say, mind. Now we'll go on.”

With Christopher's assistance, Mr. Gudge contrived with some difficulty to rise, and get upon the march again, having thus unsatisfactorily brought the conversation to a conclusion. And fearful of committing himself, he did not appear anxious to re-commence it ; but they walked on silently together, following the rough mule-track that formed the only path.

The day wore on ; and its beauty began to decline as they arrived at St. Pierre,—the last village up the mountain. The glow of the afternoon sun gave way to a dull uniform grey ; the air became chilly ; big drops of rain fell now and then ; and there was altogether a promise of an ugly night. The scenery, too, lost all its beauty, which had given way to an expanse of bare and savage wildness, stretching up, on and on, apparently to the clouds, that were now beginning to settle themselves heavily round the peaks, entirely veiling them. And a curious wailing sound caused by the wind, and heard only in these high mountain solitudes, gave a further token of approaching bad weather.

"We must get on," said Christopher, as Mr. Gudge, somewhat breathless and thirsty, stopped at the fountain to have "a sup of brandy and water." "It would not do to be left behind, in such a wild place, by the day-light."

"Oh, there's no hurry," replied Gudge ; "we shall do. The beauty of the road is, that you can't miss it if you would—for there's no other. Now then, try my grog. It'll do you good ; make you walk up hill like a lamplighter."

Christopher just put his lips to the proffered leather cup ; and off they started again.

And it was not before they ought to have done so : for when the elements intend to hold a rout upon the Alps, they are not long in making up their minds to it. The rain, which had begun to come down rather sharply, changed to a driving sleet as they got higher ; and the traces of vegetation ceased, except the few lichens which clung to the rocks, giving additional dreariness to the scene. Far up and away, however, they could see a light, which Christopher at first imagined to be the Convent ; but as they reached it at last, after toiling along the steep path, it turned out to be a mere hut, one story high, called the Canteen,—the last habitation on the Swiss side of the St. Bernard ; and only used as a station for the coarsest refreshment. Here they heard that the mules and the *char-à-banc* had preceded them some three or four hours ; and they had still three good miles to go, to reach the Convent, over the worst part of the road.

It looked so wild and awfully lonely without that Christopher proposed they should stay at the Canteen, putting up with what accommodation it could offer,—which was the floor for a bed and some tough bread for supper,—and go on in the morning. Mr. Gudge, however, foresaw the state of mind into which the partner of his life would be thrown by their non-appearance, and the series of “scenes” attendant on it, and therefore he determined to go on; borrowing a curious machine, (which you would not have taken for a lantern unless you had been told it was one, being more like a tin bird-cage with horn sides,) as well as some matches.

The sleet gradually turned to snow; and had it not been for the overcharged water-courses choosing the footpath for their channel, all traces of the track would have been lost by the heavy fall. There was not much conversation passed between them. They were both gasping with their exertions, and literally walking up a series of cascades all the way; whilst the increasing darkness, the thickening snow, and the louder howling of the wind betokened that much worse might be expected. The flakes were like nothing they had before seen. They were large and hard; and nearly cut their eyes out as they drove against them.

“Well,” said Mr. Gudge, as a short bit of pathway, on the level, allowed him to draw his breath.—“This winds up every thing. I was a fool,—an ass,—an idiot to come. I can’t go much further.”

“Come on,—come on,” observed Christopher, with some anxiety, as Gudge pulled up, and leaned upon his stick. “It will be night soon; and then I’m sure I can’t tell what will become of us. Pray, walk faster.—Ah! here it comes!”

Those who have never witnessed a storm on the heights of the Alps, can form but little idea of its terrible grandeur from the tempests of ordinary climates. The elements appear to increase their fury in comparison with the grandeur of Nature’s works around them. Sheets of mingled fire and water, chequered by huge snow flakes, seem to fall continuously from the crags and sweep over the mountains; whilst the thunder never ceases,—the echoes prolonging the reverberations of one crash until another begins; and above all, the mighty roar of the falling avalanches, high up on the snowy wastes where no living thing ever trod, increases the wild tumult. In a few minutes the streams swell to torrents, bearing down with them huge blocks of granite and mountain *débris*, which leap and bound from precipice to hollow, like pebbles, with a resistless force perfectly awful; some of the larger turned from their channel, breaking their course into the still lower depths of the valleys, splitting the fir-trees like reeds before them. And there is not a human sound of despair which may not be heard, but louder many hundred degrees, amidst the shrieks and howls, and mighty calling of the elements.

Gudge tried to light his candle, but it was impossible in the tearing wind; and they staggered on, until they just made out a low building on the side of the way, which might have been taken, in another situation for an ice-house.

"Stop!" cried Christopher, "we can light the candle here; but you must stoop down to enter."

There was no door—merely a low, arched opening; and they crept in, not without misgiving that some of the animals of these wild regions had sought shelter there, and might attack them for intruding. But nothing interfered with them. Some dry, brittle rubbish crushed and rattled below their feet, and this was all.

"Now then for the lantern," said Gudge. "Come: we may do pretty well yet; we can't be far from the Convent."

"They told us three miles at the Canteen," said Christopher. "We must have come two."

"We should never have got the matches to burn, but in this shelter," said Gudge, as he rubbed a match against the wall; "There!"

The light burnt up as he was speaking, and he looked around him. But scarcely had his glance fallen on the floor, when he uttered a howl of terror, and darted to the opening of the hovel, clutching Christopher by the arm, and pulling him with him so hurriedly that his cap was left behind.

"Come out—come out!" he screamed, rather than cried, "it is a grave, and swarms with human bones! What can it be? Keep near me; but come away. Further—further still!"

There was such an expression of horror and agony in his face, that Christopher was equally startled for the moment. But he soon said:

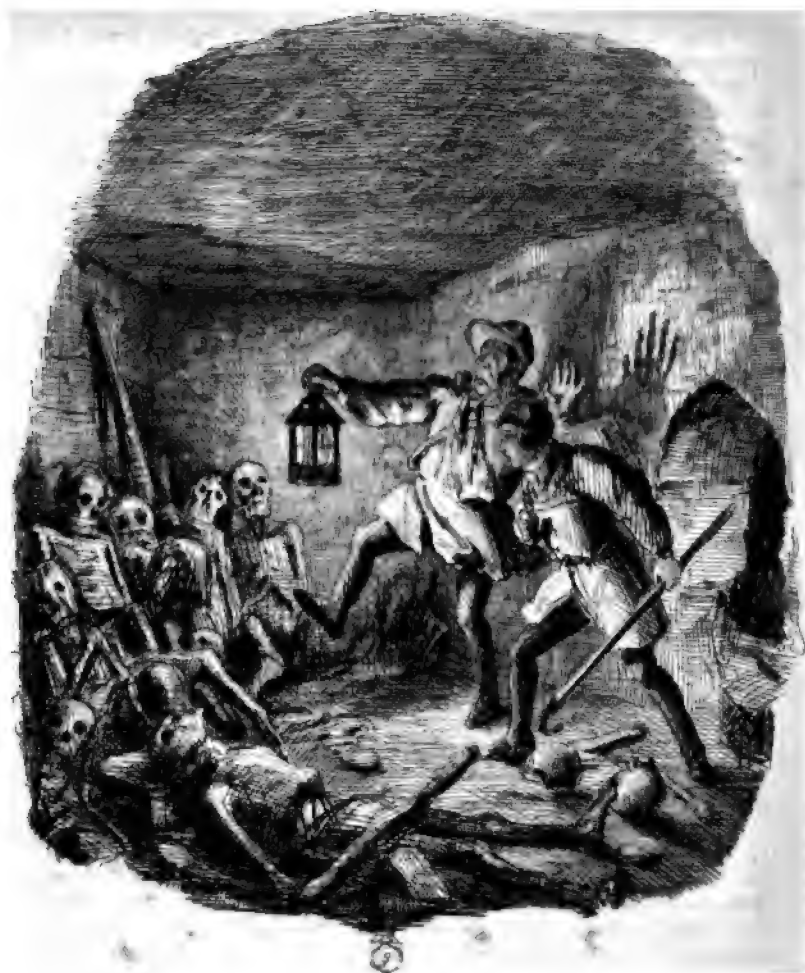
"You must be mistaken—some animal has died here. I will look: besides, I have lost my cap."

"Don't look, I tell you; come away!" exclaimed the other, trembling violently. "I never saw but one dead body in my life, and then the room was full of people. But to meet one here! never mind your cap. Come away: it is a tomb—a grave!"

"There is nothing in it that will hurt me," said Christopher, as he went towards the hut, and held up the lantern. And then he saw that Gudge was right: for the ground was really covered with dark, human bones and skulls, and mummy-like forms, some of which they had trodden down on entering. A slight shudder quivered through him. He hooked his cap out with the chamois horn at the end of his pole, and returned to Gudge.

"I cannot tell what this terrible place is," he said; "but they are human remains."

Neither Christopher nor his companion knew that the building they had entered was the lower Morgue, or dead-house of the Convent: which the visitor may readily recollect at the side of the pathway up the last steep. The bodies of those unfortunates who perish on their way in the winter, are placed here; and from the low temperature, do not decay by the ordinary process of decomposition. There is a larger building close to the Convent, appropriated to the same purpose, but its entrance is barred and grated. The one down the



The Skeletons

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mountain is open ; and any traveller who cares to inspect so dismal a receptacle, may enter.

The terror into which Gudge had been thrown, was something strange to behold. All thoughts of their unpleasant situation, at the moment, appeared to desert him. He dragged Christopher away from the Morgue, and hurried along a pathway at the edge of a gorge, which the drift had left somewhat clear. It was not the right track. He knew not where he was going ; but anywhere—it was all the same—to get away from the dreadful place.

“Come on,” he said, “this way. I never saw a corpse before but once. They wanted me to look at Sir Frederick Arden when he was drowned, and in his carriage ; but I would not for any money. And now I crunched and felt them !—Ugh ! Come on—come on !”

“But which way are you going ?” said Christopher ; “we appear to be descending. This cannot lead to the Convent.”

“It must lead somewhere,” replied Gudge, nervously. “I will not go by there again. Hold up the lantern, so : now I can see. Here is something meant for a bridge. Come on, I tell you ; can’t you move ?”

As he spoke, a sheet of lightning—it was not a flash, but a lurid glare, that made every object start into sudden distinctness, and threw out the towering peaks of the Mont Velan into wonderful relief against the back sky—lighted up the path before them, across which enormous masses of snow were whirling down from the heights, and then gathering into avalanches to rush down into the gorge below. This was followed by a clattering peal of thunder that appeared to shake the very mountain to its foundation, as the shouting echoes carried its roar along the entire chain, repeating themselves until the din was absolutely infernal.

“Over the bridge !” cried Christopher, as with a comprehensive glance he saw the extreme peril of their situation. “Over the bridge, and go along the other side of the torrent. The snow is shooting down from the mountain a-head, enough to cover up a village. Stop ; let me go first with the light.”

The bridge was the mere trunk of a tree thrown across the water-course, underneath which the swollen stream was lashing and tumbling down a rugged flight of huge natural steps to the depths of the gorge. Christopher passed over with care, and then held up their beacon for Gudge to follow. But so miserably shaken and in a measure beside himself with terror was the attorney, that in the very centre of the bridge he missed his footing, and stepping on the edge of the tree it tipped over, and he fell into the boiling eddy below.

It was not deep : the water roared over the smoothed granite blocks, and dashed round them without ever being more than a foot or two in depth ; but it did this with a force that would have swept a far sturdier and heavier man than Gudge from his legs. The channel was at a very steep pitch down the gorge ; it might have been almost compared to a narrow, elongated cascade ; and he was driven on by the force of the water, from one block to another,—now literally washed over a

level mass, and now driven round an opposing rock,—his mountain-pole, which he had lost from his grasp in the shock, following him in the current.

He screamed to Christopher for aid; but every time the resistless power of the impetuous stream stopped his utterance, as it bore him on, bruised and wounded, over fresh obstacles. Christopher who was now dreadfully alarmed as well—though chiefly upon the other's account—kept close to the edge of the stream, leaping down from rock to rock with fearful recklessness, as he tried to show the dubious light from their lantern, and hold out his pole to Gudge, that he might clutch hold of it.

Again the lightning blazed over the awful gorge of the “Gouffre du Diable” that was yawning in black impenetrability below them. By its sudden gleam Gudge caught hold of his staff, that was hurled against him by the fall, and gave the end of it to Christopher, who was upon the rocks a few feet above him. The other caught hold of it; and was pulling Gudge to the edge of the torrent, when the chamois horn, which formed its crowning ornament, gave way, and he fell back again into the raging waters—tossed from side to side, immersed, thrown up again, and turned over, as a nut may have been seen, in one of the gutters of the steep city lanes, running down towards the Thames.

His position was now one of intense peril. Not twenty yards below him the torrent narrowed its course, and then leaped at once into an abyss so deep that its fall could scarcely be heard amidst the riot of the elements. Towards this he was being rapidly hurried. The mountain over which the rapid was flowing had evidently been riven at this point, in some former convulsion, and the water passed between two table rocks, once forming a solid mass, by an opening not two feet broad, before it tumbled down into the gorge. There was room enough for him to be carried between these piers; and such would have been the case, had not his pole, by the merest chance, crossed the gap, instead of shooting through it lengthwise, and formed a species of barrier to his further progress. Christopher saw this, and leaving the lantern on the bank, he leaped upon one of the rocks, and gave him his hand. With the greatest difficulty,—for the rush of water kept him forcibly against the rock,—and after many slips, Gudge contrived to climb upon the block; and then, perfectly overcome, he fell senseless on its rough, hard surface.

It was some little time before he recovered. When he did they were nearly hemmed in by the snow, which still drifted, rather than fell, in overwhelming masses. Every trace of a pathway had disappeared; they were in a wild and savage glen of crags and torrents, where scarcely the trusty foot of a chamois hunter could have trodden with safety, not knowing what precipice the smooth face of the snow veiled. The lantern still kept alight, struggling hardly with the storm, but throwing forth a sufficient gleam to guide them; and by its aid Christopher partly led, partly supported, his companion to a comparatively sheltered spot, where the lightning, as it illumined the sky far above

them, showed that they were at the bottom of a gorge, on either side of which the high rocks arose, towering several hundred feet over their heads. And here, breathless and exhausted, they both sank upon the ground.

The miserable attorney was scarcely alive. Chilled almost to death by the water,—which, in common with the majority of mountain streams, had its source in one of the glaciers high up on the summit,—contused and scared, it was some time before he could speak.

"It is all over," he gasped at last; "we must die here. I am going to sleep; and I've read that anybody who goes to sleep in the snow never wakes again."

"See if you can walk about," said Christopher. "Here is your pole. Come,—I will try and lift you."

"No! no!" replied Gudge. "I can't rise. Leave me alone. We must die;—who could live through a night here; and who is to help us? Die!—and I am not prepared. I am not prepared! I dare not die."

He covered his face with his hands, and, cowering to the ground, cried like a child.

"We may be nearer help than we imagine, after all," said Christopher; "if we can but keep up till morning. If what they say of the Great St. Bernard monks and dogs be true, they would be sure to be on the alert a night like this."

"Do you think so?" asked Gudge eagerly, clinging to the slightest straw of comfort Christopher held forth, with the most feeble spirit. "What have you heard? What makes you say so?"

"I have only heard stories about them," replied Christopher;—"their wonderful sagacity, and the unceasing watch kept by the monks."

"Yes?" interrupted Gudge anxiously. "Go on."

"And—and—that's all I know," answered Christopher.

Gudge gave a groan of despair. Clutching at every thing, in his miserable terror, he had even trusted to something that Christopher might say for comfort; and then, again, he almost whined in his terror.

"I have done wrong towards you," he said: "I have kept back that which you ought to have had, and this is my punishment. To die here; and never to be found—never to be buried!"

The cold was overcoming him. He shuddered violently; his teeth chattered; and he had almost lost his power to speak.

"What do you mean?" asked Christopher eagerly, all his curiosity excited by the last speech. "Tell me now,—I beg and pray you to tell me now, what was the secret about my birth, which you alone, I am sure, are in possession of."

"We ought to have no secrets here," said Gudge, crouching against the rock, which, overhanging, formed some sort of shelter from the large snow flakes which found their way even to the bottom of the gorge. "I shall have done something in telling you. Not much—not much. I was wrong; I ought to have done so before. But you will forgive me, Christopher?"

There was such an abject crawling manner in Gudge's delivery of these words, that, in spite of all the circumstances, Christopher could not help regarding him with the most extreme disgust. But his curiosity had been so keenly excited, that he pressed Gudge still more earnestly to make the promised revelations. And so great was the terror of the attorney in their present frightful condition, where all his cunning and worldliness was of so little avail,—so agonizing was to him the notion of their inability to extricate themselves from the savage wilderness into which they had been brought,—that, with little persuasion, he was prepared to explain every thing.

He seized Christopher by the hand, and was about to speak, when the deep low bay of an animal was heard above the tumult of the storm, sounding from a ledge of rock a hundred feet above them. Magnifying the sound in his fright, Gudge started wildly as he heard it, and exclaimed :

"Hark!—did you hear that? It is the wolves! There are swarms about us on these mountains; and the storm is driving them before it. They will devour us!"

"No," replied Christopher: "they would rather avoid the light than come to it. What if it should be one of the dogs! Hush!" he continued,—interrupting Gudge, who was about to speak,—“Hush! there it is again!"

The noise was repeated, and now sounded nearer: at the same time the reflection of some light was clearly visible upon the granite rock above them; and they could distinctly hear a man's shout. They both raised their voices and shouted in return. The echoes ran from crag to crag; but amongst them another sound was clearly distinct, and directly afterwards they plainly distinguished the words,—

"En avant, Lion! Bon chien! En avant, Drapeau! Hi donc!"

"They are the dogs!" cried Christopher,—“the Great St. Bernard dogs! We shall be found."

The sounds approached. Directly, they saw one of the animals spring across a fissure of the rock, whilst the other came round from the position of the water-course, and the next minute both were at their side. The first dog seized Gudge's hand, which he kept in his mouth without hurting it, although he held it with a tolerably firm grip, and commenced a loud whine of apparent satisfaction; whilst the other leapt against Christopher with a force that laid him at once prostrate on the ground: which done, he stood over him and set up such a bark, that the noises of the elements were completely drowned in it.

Before they had time to move further, the lights could be seen glancing along the snow, lower and lower down the edge of the torrent; and immediately after a couple of men carrying lanterns, and large mountain poles, were at the mouth of the gorge. One of them was dressed in the long black gaberdine of the Order of St. Bernard, with a conical black cap surmounted by a tuft upon his head. The other had the appearance of a servant of the convent; and wore the common brown frieze of the country, with a round cap.

As they arrived, the principal of the two figures went to the dog who had laid hold of Gudge's hand, and pulling him away, addressed a

few words to the attorney in French. He did not clearly understand it: in fact, he was so overcome by his deliverance, that he could not for the minute pay attention to any thing. Christopher was, however, more collected; and as he shook his canine guardian away from him, he replied to the Monk, who had asked if they were the English expected at the Convent that evening.

"Thank him—thank him for me," said Gudge to Christopher. "Tell him I'll give him any thing—all the money I have with me, if it won't hurt his feelings. To think that after all—eh?—dear me, dear me; what shall I do?"

He appeared as unable to bear the unexpected deliverance, as he had been before to meet the danger. He shook hands with Christopher; with the Monk, and his follower, and even embraced the dogs, who, directly returning the caress, turned out somewhat rougher customers than he had expected, until called away by their master.

A few words from the Monk to Christopher explained every thing. Mrs. Gudge and Mrs. Hamper had arrived at the Convent early in the afternoon, before there was any appearance of the storm; and had told the inmates that the other travellers were expected. As the day declined, and they did not make their appearance, the anxiety of Mrs. Gudge increased; and when the storm came on, which had raged with terrific violence on the summit of the pass, it was with the greatest trouble that Mrs. Hamper could keep her from rushing out herself.

It has long been the custom of the Monks of the Great St. Bernard,—which must not be confounded with the establishment of the same kind, on the Simplon,—to descend the mountain throughout the winter, and whenever they think there is occasion for them to do so at other times, in quest of travellers. Conceiving that there was some necessity for the excursion in the present instance; and, in addition, moved by Mrs. Gudge's fears, which were rapidly merging into continuous hysterics, one of the monks had started, with two of the most keen-scented dogs and the marronier, a domestic of the Convent, under whose charge the animals were placed. They had come down as far as the Lower Morgue, where Gudge had been so fearfully terrified; and which formed the usual limits of their descent under ordinary circumstances; when Drapeau took up the scent and brought them down to the tree bridge from which the wretched lawyer had fallen. Here they were for a little time at fault; but the marronier had observed the trunk of the tree turned on one side; and shifting it back to its proper position had taken the dogs across, when they had directly found out the track which Christopher had followed at the side of the torrent; and ultimately brought their masters to the crevice in which they had taken refuge.

They directly prepared to retrace their steps. Gudge could scarcely walk; indeed, it was only by plying him with brandy, from a basket-flask which the marronier carried, that they could get him along at all. Christopher was active enough; and taking up their own light he went forward with the Monk, preceded by the dogs, and followed by Gudge and the domestic. The storm had abated but little: the consciousness of security, however, gave them renewed energy; and in a very short

time they had got to the point, where Gudge in his terror first deviated from the track.

From this to the Convent, the journey was comparatively easy. The snow was still falling so heavily, that the traces of their descent had been altogether obliterated; but the dogs bounded on before them,—leaping, barking, and tumbling one over the other, and revelling in the snow as they rolled down and threw it about them, as caged Polar bears do in the water of their tanks in the hot weather.

The last steep ascent was passed, and then the lights from the Convent windows gleamed over the snowy platform before them; whilst at the smaller building on the right—to which the travellers of an inferior class: tramps, savoyards, image-men, and the like, are usually consigned—several people had ventured out upon the steps with lighted branches of fir, anxious to see the result of the expedition, as the barking of the dogs announced their arrival. And directly three or four more animals rushed out from an archway under the Convent door, and nearly overwhelmed the new comers with their greeting.

But this was nothing. For as one or two of the visitors of the Convent appeared at the window of the refectory,—the presumed perils of Mr. Gudge and Christopher having formed the only subject of conversation,—Mrs. Gudge rushed down the steps, without her bonnet, and her front much deranged by her anxiety, and with a scream of delight threw her arms round her husband's neck, and exclaimed:

“Oh! G.! G.! what have I been suffering for your sake? How could you behave so to me?”

With his perfect freedom from danger all Mr. Gudge's softened feelings had vanished. He only saw the people looking at him, and his wife's uncared-for toilet. So he quietly put her on one side, saying,—

“It's all right. Now don't make an idiot of yourself.”

And then, with the others of the party, they advanced to the steps leading to the Convent, followed by Christopher,—who was probably more bewildered than any body by the events of the last two hours; and would have willingly put up with a longer delay on the part of their deliverers, to have allowed Gudge to finish the revelations he appeared inclined to make.

The Superior received them at the entrance to the Hospice: but several of the visitors—who had been lucky enough to arrive there before them in the day time—were in the passage. Of course a thorough change of clothes for Mr. Gudge, (who, drenched with the rain and the rapid, and then refrozen, had somewhat the appearance of an ice daemon in a pantomime,) was necessary, and Christopher also stood in need of fresh garments. But as they had brought none with them they were obliged to throw themselves upon the generosity of the monks. The servant who came for their stiff and frosted attire brought them some fresh ones: and equipped in regular monastic guise—for they could get no other—as well as fortified and strengthened by some brandy, they descended to supper in the stranger's room, wherein a large party of all nations had assembled.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

YOUNG SIR FREDERICK ARDEN AND FANNY HAMPER.

BESSY PAYNE worked very hard to finish Fanny Hamper's dress by the important Tuesday. The narrow edges of silver were put round the flounces, and the two very little tiny bouquets disposed of at the most effective points; and then she packed it in a basket, and was just preparing to start, when, of all people in the world whom she would not have cared to see just at that moment, who should come in but Sprouts.

"Going out, Bessy?" he inquired. "And where to?"

"Hammersmith, Tom: to take home the ball-dress for one of Mrs. Sadler's young ladies."

"Oh!" returned Sprouts, who had evidently heard of the approaching school party from the little milliner; but was not entirely in the secret of the other affair.—"But you will not be gone very long, shall you, Bessy?"

Poor Bessy felt uncomfortable. She knew that she should be out all night, but she did not dare to say so. So she replied:

"I'm afraid it will be late, Tom,—very late indeed, before I come back, I have so much to do. What makes you ask?"

"Because I've got an order for Vauxhall," said Tom. "Think of that. Vauxhall; and you have never been there! It's of no consequence at all, you know, how late you are,—nine,—ten,—eleven even, would be in time to see something."

"I really don't know, Tom," said Bessy, feeling worse and worse, and colouring,—it was lucky she kept her back to the light, as she found, or pretended to find, the hasp of the basket so difficult to close. "No; I'm afraid—not to-night. For if I come home in good time, I am so very busy, you know."

"No I don't know it at all," said Tom. "You're working too hard. Your poor little fingers will be all bone if you go on at this rate. Come now, Bessy, make a holiday this evening when you come back. I don't mind how late it is."

"But really I have so much to do, Tom."

The hasp was more obstinate than ever, and would not shut without Bessy bent her pretty face close to it.

"Now, this is all nonsense, and precious unkind," continued Sprouts. "An order don't come every day. I've no doubt I could find heaps of girls who would jump at it; though you turn up your nose at the chance."

"Now Tom!" said poor Bessy in a tone of reproach.

"Yes, and now, Bessy! if you come to that," said Sprouts. "I never knew you so uncomfortable before. Why won't you come? I am sure you have some reason."

"Well, then," said Bessy, looking up: "there *is* a reason, Tom; but you mustn't ask me what it is: indeed—indeed you mustn't; because I have promised so faithfully not to say any thing about it to a soul. You shall know some day."

"And why not now?"

"Now don't ask me, there's a good, dear Tom," replied Bessy,—and her eyes were actually glistening, as her head almost touched the basket. "Don't ask me. You know I would tell you all about it, before any body else in the world, if I might."

"This is the first time you have ever kept any thing from me," said Sprouts.

"It is—it is, Tom," answered Bessy, almost crying outright. "And I am very sorry in having promised to do so; but it shall not happen again." And she glanced at her little Dutch clock as she spoke. "It is time for me to go," she added. "Come now, Tom: say you forgive me, and next week I'll go to Vauxhall, and some day perhaps, all over the world, if you wished it, with you; you know I would."

"No I don't," said Tom, angrily. "I don't know any thing of the kind. I only know you are not treating me well. And I have been all day looking forward to such fun to-night. Well, never mind; as you say, it's the last time any thing of the kind shall happen."

As he spoke he moved towards the door.

"Oh, Tom! don't—don't go away like that!" said Bessy, jumping up and seizing him by the arm. "Now, this is really so very unkind of you. Oh! why was I so silly as to promise not to tell any body!"

"Ah, you may well say that," said Sprouts, gradually working up his jealousy to an unwonted pitch. "Why did you, then? Well; I must see who will go with me. The order shall not be lost." And as he spoke he pulled his arm away, and banging the door after him hurried out of the house.

"Tom! Tom!" cried Bessy after him; "don't go away like that. Come back,—only for half a minute."

But he did not pay any attention to her; so Bessy looked after him for a few seconds, and then coming back to her little room, she sat down upon her basket and burst into tears.

She cried very bitterly,—sobbing as she had never done before, for this was the first quarrel they had ever had. And the first quarrel,—not a little difference, but a regular quarrel, even if only on one side,—with people who are fond of one another, is not so very ludicrous a thing after all, although disinterested parties do laugh at it. And she was in such a corner that she could not tell what to do. Miss Hamper would be expecting her, and it would never do to disappoint her. She was promised such excellent payment, too: not that Bessy was mercenary, but she was carefully hoarding up every sixpence she could spare, and all for an event in which Tom would figure with as much importance as herself. But then—he had gone away so angry—never kissed her—never even said good night. And when she thought of

this, the tears all rushed out again so fast and plentiful, that it was a wonder where they all came from ; until the clock striking told her how the time was going on. So Bessy dried her red eyes as well as she was able ; and lifting up her basket, which was not half so heavy as her own heart, started upon her journey, double locking her room after her.

She found the omnibus, and got to the inn at Hammersmith all in good time. Indeed she was half an hour earlier than she needed to have been ; and this was a sad period to wait in the cheerless room. People came in and out and stared at her ; and one or two Gents seeing her pretty face,—although it was now rather sad and pale,—wanted to be polite. But Bessy's manner of replying checked them so effectually, that they never made a second attempt. And here we will leave her, and return to Mrs. Sadler's Establishment.

The young ladies under fourteen had gone to bed ; and as it was a moonlight night, Miss Hamper, together with Miss Clifford, Miss Herbert, and Miss Maurice were allowed to stay out in the grounds later than usual. Mademoiselle Le Brun was there also, with her old guitar, which would not be tuned any how—the damps of twilight, as the lady said, affecting the strings. But this did not keep her from singing “*Tes jolis yeux bleus*” over and over again ; and so persevering was she in the repetition that the girls began to think she would never give over.

“ I am in such a fright,” said Fanny Hamper : “ I don't know what to do. If that old thing don't go away, every thing will be spoiled.”

“ Let us cast lots,” said Miss Herbert, “ which shall go and talk to her about Victor. That is the only thing that will do it.”

Miss Clifford produced three pins of different stature, which Fanny Hamper was to hold ; and whoever drew the shortest was to be, for the time, admitted to Mademoiselle's oft-repeated confidence respecting her attachment. The lot fell to Louisa Herbert, who sighed deeply.

“ Oh dear,” she said, “ I shall have to hear it all over again,—how Victor bartered his heart for gold, (I'm sure I don't wonder at it,) and how she watched for him until the spring came round again ; and how she fainted when she saw his marriage in the papers, and nothing passed her lips for a month. I should like to see myself doing that for any man, even if he was all the officers in the Twelfth. I wish she would finish.”

As if a fairy had granted some magic power, Miss Herbert's wishes were complied with at that instant, and the strain was hushed. And it was hushed in this way. Mademoiselle Le Brun could not sing without an audience ;—at all events, she loved to imagine that people were listening to her, whether such were the case or otherwise,—and so, as the play-ground was next the road, she usually selected this spot for her serenades. And on the present occasion, a rude and ill-conducted boy, passing on the highway, had added a burden to the French ballad, in a presumed dialect pertaining to a recently deceased monarch

of the Cannibal Islands, which he appeared to imagine would be in keeping with the unknown tongue in which Mademoiselle was singing. The charm was thus rudely broken: the songstress sought the house in disgust; and by way of revenge ordered the young ladies to come in as well.

Fanny Hamper lingered behind; and as the clock struck nine, a note came flying over the wall tied to an oyster shell, which she thrust into her pocket, and took up stairs.

The quartette of young ladies had a small chamber to themselves, at the extremity of one of the wings of the house. Against this a laundry had been built, its flat roof being immediately below the window; and the roof was about a foot higher than the wall, which separated the play-ground from the road. On this eventful evening, the chamber was a scene of great and intense excitement. None of them thought of going to bed; but they sat round the window, watching the road until the time came.

And with the eventful hour, came also Sir Frederick Arden, driving a Hansom cab, all by himself. He looked up at the window, and then appeared about to stop, when, suddenly moving on again, he was lost at the turn of the road.

"I wonder what he means!" said Fanny. "How very odd!"

But an explanation was soon given by the appearance of a policeman coming the other way, who walked gravely down the road, and soon vanished. In another minute or two, the cab returned.

Sir Frederick looked at the window, and took a pea-shooter, which he had provided to announce his arrival with against the panes, from his pocket. But there was no necessity for it. The sash went up very silently—Fanny Hamper had used nearly all her soap in smoothing its course in the morning—and then a white handkerchief was waved in token of recognition, and a mysterious little bundle thrown out, which, of course, he could not catch. And, next Fanny stepped out upon the roof of the laundry, and the three girls clustered round the window to watch her escape, in breathless anxiety.

As young Arden got down to pick up the bundle, he turned the cab half round, backing the driver's seat against the wall, to the top of which it almost reached.

"Now, Fanny," he said, "mind how you come. You had better turn round—that's it. Now then, give me your foot—that's the wall."

"I am sure if anybody had told me I could get along here, I should never have believed them," said Fanny, as she paused an instant upon reaching the wall.

"We don't know what we can do until we try," answered Frederick. "And you are such a brick!—you beat the jolliest girl I know, all to chalks."

"Hush! Frederick!—now don't talk so. What a horrible cab you have got!"

"Oh, it's slap up!" returned the young hopeful. "I wouldn't

bring my own; it's so handsome that it would be observed. These wheels run like one o'clock!"

"Oh my goodness, Frederick!—we shall be at Richmond before that time!" observed Fanny Hamper, perfectly misunderstanding him.

"Pshaw!—yes: what a dear little goose you are! Now then, look alive. Tread on the seat."

"I won't, Frederick. Now I declare I will not, if you don't look the other way. It is so very dreadful: I'm quite ashamed of myself as it is."

"Oh, what's it matter?"

"Well now, I won't: and you may stay all night. Come, Sir: now Frederick—recollect the girls."

As Arden turned round at her request, Fanny contrived, with a great display of courage and surefootedness, as well as of ankles, to climb from the wall to the perch of the cab, and thence to the ground. When there she told her cavalier that he might look again, and got into the vehicle. Sir Frederick mounted to his seat, Fanny waved her hand to the girls as the others bowed, and off they started.

"Fanny!" said the Baronet, speaking through the little trap in the top of the Hansom.

"Law! Frederick, how you startled me! I could not think where the voice came from."

"That is why I got a cab like this. I would not bring a man, because he might split: and if I had got another, I could not have talked and driven at the same time. Isn't it fun?"

"Yes—but I'm terribly afraid it will be found out."

"Not a chance of it: you shall leave when you like, and can get back as quietly as you came out. P'st—come up. This is the style of doing it. These high wheels would run you to blazes in five minutes."

"Oh! Frederick—what horrible language! Who ever heard such a word."

"I have—often," said the other. "Now then, lazy! c'ck!"

The horse trotted on, and in a few minutes they came to the inn where poor Bessy was expecting them.

"Here we are, Fanny," said Sir Frederick, as they drew up. "Stage the first over. What's in that little bundle?"

"Oh—things—you know."

"But I don't know—what are things?"

"Well,—you should not ask, Sir Impertinence. Now, am I to get out of the cab by myself; or do you feel disposed to assist me. What shocking doors! And Frederick—ask if that little milliner girl is here."

By the assistance of the young gentleman, Fanny went through the difficult process of getting out of a Hansom cab with becoming propriety, and was directly shown up stairs to a room, which had been got ready for her: and where Bessy Payne was immediately in

attendance, rejoiced, at last, that some relief had come to her dispiriting loneliness.

Next to going shopping with ladies, nothing is so wearying to gentlemen of active minds, as waiting whilst they dress. It is impossible to conceive what they do to make out the time; for, simply and mechanically considered, a quarter of an hour ought to suffice for putting on the most elaborate toilet ever made. Sir Frederick Arden did not trouble himself to think; but lighted a cigar, and went down to have a little lively conversation on topics of the day, with a select circle of omnibus conductors and proprietors of one or two tax-carts, waiting in front of the inn. And as he insisted upon treating the assembly to whatever they chose to order, he was enabled to romance to any extent, without fear of contradiction.

"You've got a likely horse there, Sir," said one of the men, as he eyed the animal in the cab. "He's been a good'un in his time."

"Yes—yes," answered young Arden; "and I've got him cheap too, for the night. I offered to fight his master, whether I should give him two guineas or ten shillings, and I won. He knocked up at the second round. He couldn't stand this, you know. Feel there."

And here Sir Frederick took off his coat, stripped up his shirt-sleeve, doubled his arm, and went round the circle of company for them to feel his muscle, and admire its toughness.

"There's a *biceps*!" he added: "iron—isn't it? All my muscles are the same. I could crack a walnut between my shoulder blades too. And look at my chest—see here: pectoralis as big in proportion as a bird's: and all solid muscle. Nick Mawley says, I could lick any of the light weights, if I went in for that line of business."

There was not anything very remarkable in Sir Frederick's muscular development—there never is in men who are always talking about and shewing it: or if there should be, they never have pluck in proportion. But all the present companions of the young Baronet felt his arms, and were astonished at the *biceps*, and said they shouldn't like to have a blow from it: and then he felt truly happy.

"My legs are just the same," he said: "I can stick to anything. I've ridden colts that have thrown all the best rough-riders in the Blues."

"I dare say," replied the company, generally.

"You know the railings that divide the Serpentine bridge?"

"Oh, yes," they all knew it very well.

"Well then, I made an unbroken horse I was riding take those backwards, and I cleared them."

The company expressed admiration.

"But that's all nothing. I've got a mare at home that will take anything. I rode her at the Thames one day off the Brocas, at Eton, and, 'pon my life, she almost cleared it."

"Oh, she didn't quite then, Sir?" asked one of the circle.

"No, no; not quite: came down in the water over half way though. It was five-and-twenty feet deep, and we went down like a shot, 'till I felt her feet touch the bottom, up she sprang again, and I turned her round, and swam her down to Windsor Bridge, before the Queen and thousands of people."

"She must be worth something," said another.

"I refused fifteen hundred guineas for her yesterday. True bill, Sir, so help me several champions of the light weights."

In this way did the conversation proceed, until the chambermaid came down to say that the ladies were ready; upon which Sir Frederick took away the nosebag, from which the horse had been trying to toss corn into his mouth for the last half hour, and bearing him up in true cabman-like style, drew up to the door, and hailed Fanny with a "Here you are, Miss!" as she appeared, accompanied by Bessy, whose alarm at the rash freak, kept her quivering like an aspen leaf. The ostler threw open the doors; Miss Hamper entered, having disposed of her dress, so that scarcely any room was left for Bessy; the front windows were clattered down, startling the inmates into fits, as they always do in Hansom's cabs, unless nervous passengers are prepared for it; the loiterers winked at one another, and off the expedition started to Richmond.

They were not long going. The horse was refreshed; the high wheels bowled along lightly; and Sir Frederick 'put the steam on,' as he termed it, which consisted in lighting another cigar and whipping the horse, stopping only once at the Star and Garter, at Kew Bridge, for a glass of pale ale, and an unsuccessful attempt to persuade the girls to follow his example. And then they were off again: up one side of the steep bridge, and down the other,—over the green,—under the wall of the Royal Gardens; and finally, after rattling along George Street, they came to the Greyhound Inn.

The company were all arriving at the Castle Hotel, and there was a long line of carriages and gleaming lamps at the end of the street. Sir Frederick would not go up to the door with the cab, so he pulled up at the Greyhound, and having assisted Fanny Hamper and her companion into the passage, took the cab round to the yard, and immediately rejoined them.

"I am thinking what we shall do with you," he said to Bessy, "for you will be tired before we come back with sitting up alone. Suppose you come up to the Hotel, and then I can get you to assist in the refreshment room. You may be amused."

Still trembling at her imprudence, Bessy consented. Such a decided first step had been taken, that it did not do to flinch now from other proposals.

"How are we to get to the Castle, Frederick?" asked Fanny Hamper.

"Oh, we can walk," was the reply.

"Walk!" exclaimed Fanny, with astonishment.

"Why not?—It is a fine dry night. Besides, you will see my plan.

Tie your handkerchief round your head, and take my arm. Your little friend will follow us."

Fanny did not need much persuasion, so she did as young Arden requested; and telling Bessy to keep close to them they tripped along the pavement, and in two minutes were under the portico of the Castle Hotel.

"Now wait a minute," said Frederick, "and see what I am going to contrive."

He drew her back, as one or two of the vehicles put down their guests, until a family carriage drew up, from which a lady and three girls descended. As they entered the hall, Frederick followed them closely with his charge, and went into the room where the vouchers were exchanged, and the tickets paid for.

"Ah, Sir Frederick!" said the lady, "we did not expect to see you here. Who are you with? I thought Lady Arden was at Brighton."

"So she is," said the young Baronet. "We came a large party though. The others are behind."

He squeezed Fanny's arm as he spoke, and then purposely keeping up the conversation, accompanied the others into the refreshment room. The object was gained. They had not appeared to enter by themselves: so everything was all right. Then planting Fanny for an instant on the sofa with them, he went back to Bessy, and knowing the proprietor, installed her behind one of the long tea-tables.

The ball need not be described. It is sufficient that Fanny Hamper did not sit down much, young Arden now and then giving her up, 'for the look of the thing,' to two or three of 'the dear Twelfth' that he met there: some of whom danced, and some preferred pretending to play at *écarté* in the card-room—a game of flirtation which the hopeful Baronet usually interrupted. To Bessy it afforded much wonderful amusement—so much indeed that, all eyes, she forgot all the attendance she ought to have given. She saw the young ladies practising such clever manœuvres to get away from their chaperons; and telling ineligible young gentlemen that they would not dance that set, but directly afterwards standing up with the favoured one. And then she watched all their dresses, and got more hints than whole volumes of fashion books would have given her: and tried to take as many patterns home in her head as she could: and when she heard the music in the ball-room, she thought that she could dance as well as any of them, for Tom had said so. And perhaps at that very moment Tom was dancing with somebody else at Vauxhall. It was very unpleasant that—to be sure—and made Bessy for a time quite uneasy; but, just then, a waltz finished, and the crowd of dancers heated and panting, thronged round the refreshment tables, and wanted so much ice, lemonade, and cherry-water, that it was as much as Bessy could do to supply the glasses fast enough, and she had no time left to think. After this, not a few of the young men who had eyed the little girl all the time, took their partners back and then returned to talk to her: to the great anger of the other

attendants. But Bessy behaved so well ; and put them down so quietly, that there was no cause for any continued black looks. At last it became necessary for them to depart, as the grey of morning could be seen struggling in the corridor against the light of the lamps. So they went back to the Greyhound ; and in another ten minutes the pale and wearied girls were once more in the cab, and on their road home again.

They were all too tired to talk ; and the road to the omnibus public-house seemed three times as long as it had appeared before. The people were not up, and they had to wait whilst they roused them ; when Fanny and Bessy got out, and the former soon changed her things and returned, to be taken once more to Bellfield House ; and by the time they got there it was broad sunny daylight.

The cab was backed against the wall as before, and Fanny was assisted on to it by young Arden : for she did not appear by this time to be so particular about her ankles. She got on the roof of the laundry, and stepped towards the window, at which she tapped lightly with her fingers. The blind moved, and as she expected to see the fair face of either Miss Herbert, Miss Clifford, or Miss Maurice acknowledge the signal, the curtain was drawn aside, and Mrs. Sadler, in all the dignity that a dressing-gown and morning cap could give, appeared ready to receive her !

"Here's a row !" said the young Baronet, as he saw the apparition, and heard a faint cry of terror from the young lady. "Don't let her see you," he said to Bessy, hurriedly, as she looked out. "I shall be given in charge in another minute, and am no use here. She can get through it better by herself than anything I can do."

"What will become of me !" cried Bessy, in an agony of terror.

"Nothing," said the other, as he took his place upon the seat, just as Mrs. Sadler threw up the window, and said audibly, with unparalleled grandeur :

"So,—Miss Hamper—lost, abandoned, ruined girl !"

"Oh, that's enough," said Sir Frederick. "Now, I'll take you back to London," he continued, speaking to Bessy ; "all right. Good bye. Now then !"

And thus heartlessly leaving poor Fanny Hamper to her fate, he turned the horse round, and drove off towards London, as he recommended Bessy to go to sleep. She was, however, too much flurried to do anything of the kind.

But there was some one also, who had watched equally with her. It had been a sad and heavy night with poor Tom Sprouts. He had seen her go away from home, and caught a sight of her pale, unhappy little face as she left with her basket, through the 'nuts to crack' and theatrical combats in his shop window, and after that he had been very miserable. He did not go to Vauxhall. He gave his order away to the young lady who read all his old romances, and then walked up and down the court after he had put up his shutters, until he got quite tired with watching for Bessy's return, and wondering where she could have gone to, and why she would not tell him.

At last he could bear his solitude no longer, and he went out into

the New Cut for a stroll. It was a holiday evening. All sorts of people were about, laughing and merry-making; coming up from suburban trips, and from the late river boats; getting jolly in public-houses, or stifling in concerts, the wild sounds of which floated with the tobacco-smoke from the open first-floor windows. The stalls were all lighted up—there was a regular feast of paper-bag lanterns along the pavement; itinerant vendors were talking one another down, as they published the marvellous properties of their wares, and all was life and motion. But Tom felt even more wretched and lonely here, from very contrast, than he had done at home. He called on the jolly man, thinking that perhaps Bessy might be there, or that he could tell Mrs. Chirpey all about it. But the jolly man was making holiday with everybody else: there was nobody at home at his house—not even baby. So Tom went miserably home again, clinging to some slight crumb of hope that Bessy had returned in the interim.

But no: it was past eleven; her door was still locked, and no key in it, nor light in her window, which was a little way open, just as she had left it. He went away several times for ten minutes, walking round the dirty streets in the neighbourhood of the court, and thinking that when he came back he would see the light, which would be to him such a beacon of happiness. But ever when he returned the room was still dark, and the window still open.

It got very late. No more people came through the court: only the policeman. And every time he made his round, still poor Tom was marching up and down. At last he got so exhausted that he let himself into his shop, and sitting down at his counter, leaned his head upon it and fell fast asleep, with a bundle of *Tales of the Wars* for his pillow.

When he awoke, he heard a clock strike five. He was so glad to find that the night had gone, and he hurried out into the air. But it was only to be more cruelly disappointed than before. The window was still open. It was clear that Bessy had not been home at all!

Half-maddened, jaded, and crushed, he was contemplating knocking up the house, breaking into her room, or some such wild and useless outburst, when he heard a noise of wheels rattling down the street, and presently a cab stopped at the end of the court. It was evidently driven by a gentleman, who got down and assisted a female to alight from it, dragging a basket at the same time from the interior. And then he drove off again, as no other than Bessy Payne came towards the spot where Sprouts was standing.

A cry of surprize and jealousy burst from Tom's lips, as he advanced towards her, scared and distraught at what he witnessed. And Bessy, when she saw him, uttered an exclamation of fear, as she raised both her hands in an attitude of supplication. But Tom caught her fiercely by the arm, and in his terrible passion a word escaped his lips, that he often and often afterwards would have given worlds to have recalled—a terrible word that made poor Bessy shriek with terror as she heard it, and then fall fainting at her own door, white and senseless as marble.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

STILL ON THE GREAT ST. BERNARD.—THE LEGEND OF THE
TOUR DE MARTIGNY.

ALL the dangers of the mountain were soon forgotten in the cheerful sight presented by the visitors' room in the convent, when Gudge and Christopher entered.

It was a plain wainscoted apartment, with a polished wooden floor, and no ceiling, but that made of the joists and planks of the chamber overhead; some five and twenty feet long, by eighteen broad, and looking out by two windows upon the neck of the pass from Switzerland to Aosta, and the inferior building, destined for the reception of the humblest class of travellers—image-men, hurdy-gurdy boys, and the like. A log fire banged, and crackled, and blazed, upon the hearth, as if firing a succession of salutes to welcome the travellers; and it threw its cheery glow upon several pictures hung round the walls, representing the passage of Napoleon, the Hospice itself, some Patron Saints, and a fine engraving of the Dogs of the Alps, from a painting by Landseer. There was a piano, too—a real piano, upon which you might play tunes—the keys of the flats and sharps of which were white, and those of the naturals black. How it ever got up so high, and by such a road; for the *Salle des Voyageurs*, at the Great St. Bernard, is eight thousand feet above the level of the sea, and the latter part of the journey like a flight of bad stone stairs; was a problem nobody ever solved, until they were told that it was brought up piecemeal on the backs of mules, and put together there. There was a good collection of music also, on the instrument; all Louisa Puget's charming little French romances; the operas of Norma, Sonnambula, and La Gazza Ladra, entire; and several of those comical little pictorial histories, in which a kind-hearted Genevese so inimitably depicted the adventures of Messrs. Vieuxbois, Jabot, and other harmlessly eccentric characters.

Supper was soon served. It consisted of boiled meat, with potatoes, eggs, haricot beans, and a dessert of dried fruits, with wine and cheese. The superior of the convent did the honours; and Mr. Gudge made a wonderful supper; only interrupted by the questions of the more curious in the company, who could not make enough of a traveller who had been rescued by St. Bernard dogs. Christopher was equally interrogated, but with less success. The half-revealed secret which Gudge had owned to being the possessor of, had left a deep impression on his thoughts; so absent, indeed, was he, that once or twice he paid no attention to the questions of his neighbours, especially to those of an elderly young lady, who was thinking about doing a book, and would not let him rest.

"And so the dogs really came to you;" she said. "How very charming! What luck you had to be nearly lost on the Great St. Bernard. And did they carry you here, on their backs?"

"No: we walked;" replied Christopher.

"Dear me! walked, did you? I thought the dogs always carried the frozen passengers on their backs, with bottles of brandy hung round their necks. I am sorry they did not; for, do you know, once I attempted a little poem on the subject."

"Indeed!" said Christopher, vacantly.

"Yes: I am Miss Pottles; the name may perhaps be familiar to you in *The Boudoir*—a little publication dedicated to the fashions. You have seen it?"

Christopher was sorry to say that he had not.

"I send them a few columns every month; more for employment than gain. But it is getting really unpleasant; as I begin to find I am stared at so, when I go out. However, that is one of the penalties of authorship."

Miss Pottles said this, as if she had written and brought out *Waverley*, *Childe Harold*, *Hamlet*, *Pickwick*, and the whole of *Punch*, all in a week, by herself; and that the world knew it.

"Did you ascend from Martigny?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon," said Christopher, starting from a reverie. "How much?"

"No;" continued the lady, with an assumed smile, "I asked if you came from Martigny."

"Oh! Martigny—yes: we slept there, at the Hotel de la Poste."

"Ah! you should have gone to the Hotel de la Tour—La Tour de Martigny! You remember the blackened ruin, so awful in its desolation, that overhangs the village."

"Something like an old windmill?" Christopher ventured to say.

"A windmill! no—a lonely tower; about which there *must* be some fearful story, I am sure. I tried to find out from the peasants, but I could not understand a word of their miserable *patois*; and they were equally in the dark with respect to my English."

"Oh! you mean the building at the end of the valley, Miss Pottles, overhanging the Dranse;" said a young man at the other side of the table. "Why, of course you have heard the legend about it."

"Never; do you know it?" asked Miss Pottles, cagerly; as she took out a little note book.

"I'll tell it to you, if it is generally agreeable," said the tourist. Everybody said they would like to hear it, so the young traveller looked wickedly from Miss Pottles to his friends at the table, and thus began:—

The Story of the Tour de Martigny.

"A very long time ago; centuries before the invention of William Tell."—

"Pardon me," interrupted Miss Pottles; "William Tell *invented*?"

"Yes—invented. There never was such a person, you know. His birth-place was got up at Altorf, like somebody else's at Stratford-upon-Avon—to improve the property."

"But is not the apple—" again interrupted Miss Pottles.

"We will talk about that by and by;" said the tourist. "Very well. A long time ago, when St. Bernard himself was a little boy, a very powerful Baron lived at Martigny. We have no notions of Barons now: even Sir Frederick Pollock—and he's a Lord Chief—don't give you the ghost of an idea of what they were in the dark ages. They have been so reduced since then; you only meet them now traveling about in Richardson's show. They wore long black ringlets, such as Rochesters do at fancy balls; and red leggings, and russet boots, which they stamped when they were angry, and made the brick dust fly out in such a cloud, that their vassals could not see them; and so, not seeing them, were doubly awed, as we are at ghosts and thunder.

"Baron Slangembad was not a bad specimen of the class. He'd be worth any money now, preserved in a large bottle, to shew what they were like. He never shaved, nor had his hair cut in his life; wore two blunderbusses in his belt instead of pistols; could decapitate six serfs at a blow; and swore so dreadfully, that he could split ten-year old oaks with his oaths. When he chose to pay his bills, he paid them; and when he didn't, he used to hang the man who came for his money from his castle walls—as farmers hang up dead vermin to scare away the others.

"Latterly, these executions in his house became so frequent, that the people, naturally enough, supposed that all was not right. Nor was it; for this Baron had—but this is between ourselves—got rid of all his ready money in trying to make gold, which was a fashionable pursuit in the dark ages for getting rid of property in general, before horse-racing and hazard had been found out. He was always upon the point of discovering the great secret, but never arrived quite at it. To be sure, he had got hold of the true receipt for turning gold into lead, but that was so unprofitable that he did not care to follow it up on any large scale; and when he tried to reverse the process, by doing every thing the wrong way, all he got was some black ashes. Yet still he kept on. One by one his possessions passed into the hands of Jews, as their gold was swallowed up in his crucibles; and at last he thought of invoking the devil."

Miss Pottles inwardly hoped that the story was all proper.

"He did everything that ought to have been done. He said prayers backwards, and got a large book wherein all the things chemists put on their show bottles were to be found, instead of regular letters; he boiled cauldrons, and made circles with skulls, and killed infants when nobody was looking; but it was all of no use. He could not draw the devil anyhow. Perhaps the old one knew that he was sure of his man sometime or another, and so did not care to put himself out of the way to nail him more securely.

"But the worst of all this was, that besides getting rid of so much money, it was not his own that he was melting down. He had been left the guardian of his elder brother's son, Arnold, who would be of age in a month or two, and then all the property would have to be accounted for. Commercially speaking, the process of doing so would

be a mere nothing, for there was none left; but legally, he had many qualms, as Arnold's mother was related to all the chief Barons in Switzerland—which is a pleasant spot, celebrated for its boys and cottages—and any family wrong acted like a quick-match amongst them all, and the whole party would then blaze away, and bluster, and bang like a firework.

"Baron Slangembad scarcely knew what to do. He would have gone off some fine morning to America, only it had not been discovered yet; or he would have fled to Boulogne, but France was, just at that time, at war with everybody. He set to work with double energy, and the little money that remained, working night and day in his laboratory, into which he never had allowed any soul to enter. But his efforts were still of no avail. All his gold dissolved away soon enough, but never yielded a profit, so that nothing remained but a quantity of *eau d'or*, very nasty, to say nothing about being deadly poisonous.

"At length he determined upon a very dreadful resolve. You know how the Tour de Martigny stands: high up and away from the ground, on a rock, like an insolvent lighthouse. Well; he got Arnold to accompany him to his laboratory, which was in the Tower, one day when nobody was looking; and under pretence of leaving him there, whilst he went back to his château to fetch something, he turned the keys upon all the doors, left poor Arnold quite alone, and then ordered all the calves on his domain to be driven into the pastures that surrounded the foot of the hill on which the Tower of Martigny is placed. He did this because he knew the animals would keep up a constant bleating, and drown the cries of Arnold when he began to sing out for assistance, until his strength failed from starvation. He was a pretty specimen of the dark ages—wasn't he? He made you quite regret the cut-throat, swindling, brutal epoch they call the olden time—didn't he?"

Miss Pottles looked grave. Like all elderly young ladies who write, she had great respect for the "stirring days of old," as she called them: her admiration being especially bestowed upon troubadours, little foot-pages, red-cross knights, and other apocryphal personages. So she drew herself up, and thought the traveller had a coarse mind; as he continued:—

"Having done this, he went back to his house, and made himself quite comfortable, making pretence, however, of being greatly surprised at Arnold's non-appearance when the dinner-gong sounded; and sending out his spare retainers to look after him, in all sorts of improbable directions. And then he laid up his legs on the table; gave orders that he would not be disturbed; got very drunk, and so went to sleep.

"But he was aroused early in the morning by a bearer of strange intelligence. The Dranse, which you crossed and re-crossed so frequently to-day, and which flowed through his estate, had dried up in the night! Perfectly dried up! and its alluvial bed was now covered by dead fish, baked in the sun like bloaters, except where a few cunning old trout had remained in holes, and these fell an easy prey to the astounded villagers. What could be the matter?

"They spent an entire day and night in conjectures, the inquiry being prolonged by the arrival of a large body of the Duke of Savoy's people from Chillon, who affirmed that Lake Lemman had fallen six inches in as many hours, and that the Rhone was not half so dirty as usual. They sent to all the clever men in Switzerland—to Professor Schwindlitz, of Zurich; and Herr Backoftener, of Lucerne; and Meister Bear, of Berne; and other members of the scientific congress, who had eaten their way through every canton in Switzerland, and requested they would assemble immediately. And then somebody thought that perhaps the readiest way to arrive at the truth, was to follow the course of the river, until they might, perchance, find out what kept back the water. Of course, every body said directly that they had been thinking of that plan all the time, as everybody always does in similar positions; and then they all started off, to prove their sympathy with the recommendation—the Baron and his equals on horseback, and the common people running at their heels.

"They went up—and up—and up; past St. Branchier, and Orsières, and Liddes: by the very road you traversed to-day; and at last just by Alève—where it gets so cold that beans won't grow like beans, but are ripened artificially—they found out the cause of the evil. A large block of the glacier—a mass of ice that would have found the world in sherry cobbles to the end of time—partially thawing, had slid down from the heights, and blocked up the river, like a lock, or a mass of rubbish in a tributary gutter to Lower Thames Street; and behind this a mighty lake was collecting: rising up the valley, and swallowing the cottages one after another, as it drove the poor devils thus washed out, higher and higher, until they were nearly touching the perpetual snow.

"Nothing could be done. The enormous mass defied all human or mechanical labour; and still the Dranse kept collecting its torrents above it. All the Baron was able to recommend was, that they should bore a comparatively small hole through the ice, that some little water might descend, for general purposes. Having ordered which, he came away.

"A day and a night passed; and all this time poor Arnold was in the Tower. He had found some small loaves of bread, as hard as brickbats, which the Baron had forgotten, and these had somewhat satisfied the cravings of hunger; and he had shouted until he was hoarse, but to no avail; and then he saw the trap into which he had fallen, and made up his mind to the worst accordingly. In an opera he would have treated himself to a *scena*; in a ballet he would have indulged in a *pas de résignation*. As it was, he made a huge pipe out of a retort with the bottom broken out, this he filled with tobacco from the Baron's store, which he also discovered; and then prepared to smoke himself into stupidity—which is a less difficult task than, at first sight, may be supposed.

"Night came on, and in the middle of it the Baron was awakened by a roaring noise, so very terrible that it sounded as if the thunder had left the skies, and come clattering down the Alps into the valley, to

astonish them. But there was no lightning, yet the château shook to its very foundation; and every now and then there was a crash, like nothing else but what the Baron had sometimes heard when battering down a rival potentate's castle. He jumped out of bed, and looking from the window, saw that the whole country around him was a sheet of foaming leaping water. Some of the chalets that he knew were on his estates, had clean disappeared; others were floating, almost entire, like ships, upon its surface, with the scared inmates tossing their hands wildly out of the windows, until they drifted out of sight. For the Swiss houses then, as now, are so light and tight, that a man might make a voyage round the world in one of them, if he were not particular about fast sailing.

"Higher came the water; and fiercer raged the power of the stream, until it rushed into the first floor windows of the château, and then the Baron thought it was beginning to get interesting enough to suggest his moving away in the best manner he possibly could. The rats, too, were swarming up into his room, driven from the cellars and stables by the water: so just as the stream came up to his apartment, he drew the longest drawer from his wardrobe, launched it through the window, got into it, and drifted away with the rest of them. For now the deluge carried with it peasants, cattle, and furniture; bears, chamois, and poultry, all floating together in terrible confusion."

Miss Pottles, who had been making notes furiously, shuddered at the picture. The narrator went on:

"At last the frail vessel conveying the Baron, struck against the base of the Tower, which was yet above the flood, and dashed to pieces, leaving its passenger on the rock. He clung to the rough stone-work, and then perceived the pale face of Arnold gazing, in scared anxiety, through the windows. But it was only for a few minutes. The waters rose higher and higher; and his only chance of escape was by gaining entrance to the Tower. In this, however, he was foiled, and by his own bad deeds: for he had locked all the doors when he came out; and in the hurry of his debarkation he had been guilty of an omission which, in private life, is productive of more misery than any other musquito of domestic tranquillity—he had forgotten his keys! As the flood washed higher up the Tower, he tried to clutch at every point that presented itself; but all was of no avail. The weather and time together had so worn it, that its smooth surface offered nothing to lay hold of. And so at last with a wild useless scream of agony, he was whirled away by the rush of waters, like a cork down a weir, and was never seen again for a week, when his body astonished a sober Genevese, one fine afternoon, by suddenly bobbing up from the lake under his back window, in the Rue du Rhône.

"Of course the cause of all this was easily explained. The Dranse had collected behind the lump of glacier, until its weight had broken it down; and then it came all at once, and produced the excitement just alluded to. But the rush was over equally soon; and when the torrent abated, the rightful heir was found quite safe, but dreadfully hungry, shut up in the laboratory, with all the Baron's chemicals and

galeemics, and what was more, the title-deeds to his estate, of which he immediately took possession. And he lived long and happily: for the geological stuff—I don't know what the name of it is, but I'll send the question to Bell's Life when I get home; and they know everything—the residue of the inundation so enriched the lands, that they became worth twice as much; and Arnold married the prettiest girl in all Switzerland—which, by the way, is not saying a great deal—and died a second Methuselah."

And here the narrator looked gravely round the table, and very imposingly at Miss Pottle's, as he said in a deep bass voice, with an important signification:

"Moral!

"Thus, we see that cheating never thrives; and that rightful heirs always, sooner or later, come to their own; and those that keep them out of it, can't keep themselves long above water, after all. Hurrah! Three cheers for virtue!"

The comical tourist rapped the table himself as he spoke, and nearly all the guests did the same, in approbation of the sentiment, including two or three foreign gentlemen, who did not precisely comprehend the ceremony, but wished to be social, as, with all their faults, foreign gentlemen always try to be. And as soon as Miss Pottles had caught up the last sentence in her note-book, she said:

"The Dranse has frequently overflowed, from the same cause. There is a black mark round the Hotel de la Tour, at Martigny, shewing where the waters rose to in 1818, by a similar accident. Dear me! and do you suppose this is all true?"

"Not one syllable of it," answered the tourist. "I consider the whole of the story to be the greatest lie ever invented."

"Indeed, sir!" said Miss Pottles, very indignant indeed, "then I think, in common courtesy, you might have kept it to yourself. We shall not know soon, what to believe, and what not to, at this rate."

"I have been in that position, as regards travelling legends myself, for some time," said the tourist. "The minute I found that the Rhine was such a contemptible swindle, I hardened my heart against all 'associations.' What did you think of the story, Sir?" he added, suddenly turning to Gudge.

"Oh! very good; very good;" replied the attorney. But he said it, as if he had been requested to give his opinion of corked claret at a good client's dinner-table.

Miss Pottles, still indignant, retired to bed, and the party soon broke up; but not before Mr. Gudge had fallen asleep, and snored loudly before them all. And then the good monks led them to their chambers, which were bare wainscoted rooms, with double windows, and little pictures of saints hung around them. All the beds had eider down coverlids on them; things something between pillows and balloons, which, wherever they were placed, were always found on the ground in the morning.

The cold was intense. Although there were circular stone stoves divided amongst the angles of contiguous rooms, the breath formed

fairy groves, upon the window panes, as it would have done at home, in our hardest frosts. But the majority of the guests were so tired with the fatigues of the day, that they did not heed the temperature, but were soon asleep, including Mr. Gudge, who had gone through his night toilet with his eyes shut.

Christopher, however, could not get to sleep. Over-weariness, at times, merges into an excitement which keeps you awake; added to which, he could not drive the hints and admissions of Gudge from his mind. As he lay nestled in his bed, all the scenes of his early life rose up, and dissolved in his waking dreams; and from all of them he endeavoured to gain some clue to the labyrinth of his thoughts—even to the days of his labours in the Cheshire salt mine. But he could make nothing of it, albeit the rack of his brain kept him awake, all through the silence of the night, which was broken only by the occasional distant roar of an avalanche on Mont Velan, or the deep bay of the dogs, sounding from their large kennel in the lower story of the Hospice.

The next morning, at six o'clock, they were up, and assembled in the *refectoire*, with most of the party of the preceding night. *Café au lait* and toast, formed the repast; and when that was finished, they prepared to start—this time all together, for Gudge had had enough of diversions in their party, by the Col de Ferret, to Chamouny. As they passed the Morgue of the Hospice—not the one in which Mr. Gudge had been so terrified, but the dead house immediately adjoining the convent, one or two of the party stepped aside to inspect it. It was a small square building about ten feet high, with a floor lower than the level of the ground. The door was locked; but on looking through the window at the end, the dismal groups that filled it, could be plainly seen. All were in the same dresses—the same attitudes, even in which they had been found; for the temperature here is more unfavourable to anything approaching to decomposition than at the other place; so that the bodies will keep two or three years recognizable; and at last they gradually dry up and decay. It was a ghastly sight. Even those who had been taught, in a profession, to look upon death with hardened apathy—to see him in all his shapes, from the crowded dead house of the hospital, to the loathsome display in the Morgue at Paris—from the worn out victim of consumption, to the mangled corpse at the coroner's inquest—could not have helped being strangely moved as the circumstances connected with the destruction of these poor things came forcibly on their mind. The vain struggles against the fatal drowsiness—the drifting accumulating snow—the leap of the roaring avalanche, crashing and splitting all before it—the rending of the mighty glacier—all bore share in their destruction.

Nothing would induce Gudge to look through the dreary window. But Christopher and some of the party did; and then our hero pondered again on the circumstances of the night before; and scarcely exchanged a word with any one, until they arrived at the end of their journey.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MRS. HAMPER WISHES TO ASCEND MONT BLANC.

THERE is not much mistake about Chamouny. However disappointed travellers may feel at the first sight of the majority of the continental show places, with which they have only been acquainted through the medium of Annuals and dioramas; yet few pens or pencils can do justice to the exceeding grandeur of this valley.

And yet, even when there, the idea of its vastness is never on a sufficiently grand scale. For everything about is so gigantic, that no good comparison can be made. You imagine that you could sit at the hotel-door and shoot an arrow clean over Mont Blanc, using very little more power than an archery meeting would require—certainly not so much as was expected from those toxophilites who drew such remarkably long bows in the middle ages. Yet Mont Blanc is three miles high—the distance between St. Paul's Churchyard and Hyde Park Corner set straight up on end!

No wonder is it that the comfortable, neat, reasonable hotels at Chamouny are always full. No one ever went there once, who did not wish to go back again, when they looked back through the stern-windows of memory upon its bright green pastures, above which the chrystal glaciers sparkled so brilliantly—its deep and scented pine woods, through which so many clear cold torrents tumbled and bubbled—its mighty barriers of granite, and eternal snow hemming it in from the world—its honey, and cattle-bells, and strawberries, and clambering mules and good-humoured guides—its unpainted wooden floors, and ceilings, and nut-crackers, and bedsteads, in which latter you sleep so soundly, in spite of the drum-like texture of the tight thin fir-wood walls, which convey every sound.

The day after our party left the Great St. Bernard, they were all safely housed in the Hotel de Londres, at Chamouny, to which young Ellis had directed his aunt when they parted at Martigny. They did everything proper on such occasions. They sent for guides, and made arrangements for their trips: they bought agate-boxes, and chrystal seal-handles, and white wood salad spoons and forks; and paid to see a chamois, kept up in a loft, with nothing but the ledge of the wainscoat to leap up and down upon. And they also entered their names, according to custom, in the visitor's book, as follows:—

"Sept. 5. Mr. Gudge, of London, arrived here from the Great St. Bernard by the Tête Noire, and intends to go home by Geneva, heartily tired of all foreign kickshaws and impositions. Don't go, anybody, to the Hotel de la Poste, at Martigny, who's once been to the Star and Garter at Richmond, because it's a failure."

"Mrs. G., accompanied her husband through the suns of Italy and snows of Switzerland, but looks forward with joy to their happy home."

Mrs. Hamper appeared to have been taken poetical for she wrote :

"Mont Blanc is the monarch of mountains
They crowned him long ago :—"

and then, her memory appearing to have deserted her, she added :—

"But who they got to put it on
We don't exactly know."

"but that has nothing at all to do with it, as the Alps are awe-inspiring and wonderful, and long may they continue the bulwark of a happy land and bold peasantry ! to whom this humble tribute from the daughter of a distant country is inscribed."

After which outpouring, everybody feeling their minds much relieved, they joined the company at the table d'hôte.

"And so you have not been up Mont Blanc yet, Edward !" said Mrs. Hamper to her nephew, as they were seated next to each other.

"No ; we have had such bad weather," was the reply. "It was lucky we did not, with that storm last night ; I think the day after to-morrow of making the attempt."

"Then I can accompany you after all !" exclaimed Mrs. Hamper. "Mr. Gudge ; here is an opportunity for you to distinguish yourself. Will you try the ascent of Mont Blanc ?"

"What—up there !" said Gudge, speaking with his mouth-full as he looked through the window, towards the mountain. "Up there ! what for ? Pooh !"

"No, G. that's right : never, with my consent, shall you risk your life," said Mrs. Gudge.

Poor Edward Ellis was dreadfully frightened when he heard his aunt announce her determination of going up Mont Blanc with him. And he did not see how he could very well back out ; for, truth to tell, he had engaged the guides that very afternoon for the ensuing day, and even paid a deposit. A gentleman he had met, had also asked to accompany him ; and in this case his aunt would be dreadful. In the event of her persisting in her intentions, he determined not to go at all, and to avoid the subject just then, he turned the conversation until the guests retired, which they do early at Chamouny, being generally pretty well wearied with the day's exertion.

But Mrs. Hamper was not so easily beaten. Before anybody was up, but the sun and the waiters, next morning, she had been out in the village, and ferreted up all the guides who were going, inquired about the weather, bought a pole, and made herself acquainted with all the details of the intended trip. And then she returned in triumph to breakfast, to tell her friends what she had done. Mr. Ellis immediately decided upon a plan. He could not openly offend his aunt for many reasons, but nothing should induce him to go with her ; he would forfeit all the money sooner than do it. And so he went that day to

see the Mer de Glace and Montanvert, and came home with a very bad sprained ankle, as suddenly acquired as that of a dancer's in an unsuccessful ballet. This, of course, precluded all possibility of his going.

"But you have engaged the guides, Edward, have you not?" said Mrs. Hamper, when they all met again at dinner. "How very unfortunate!"

"Yes, they are engaged, aunt: and have got all the things, with the ladders, cords, and hatchets."

There was a union of articles in this speech, so vividly connected with executions, that Mrs. Hamper for an instant felt her courage flinch. Edward Ellis perceived this, and added:

"You will excuse me, aunt, but—have you made your will? It is customary to do so; in fact, they keep a notary in the village for the purpose."

Mrs. Hamper's ideas of a notary had only been connected with inferior persons in rusty black, who are always at hand in a ballet or opera, to draw up the marriage articles of young betrothed persons, and as they are usually associated with those whom the world is pleased to consider Swiss peasants—boys and girls—in holiday costumes, and with festive appointments; the notion of the notary did not carry with it the solemnity desired to be induced. But Mr. Gudge had pricked up his ears at the sound of making a will; and he added—

"I don't think you'll want a foreign lawyer, when you've your own attorney with you. Allow me, madam, to construct your will; and rely upon me to see it properly executed, should this expedition unfortunately turn out fatal."

He spoke as a raven with the influenza might have endeavoured to do, under similar circumstances; and for a moment Mrs. Hamper quailed again. The guests at the table—whom the mere notion of that lady's going up Mont Blanc, had put in a comical vein of spirits—seeing the effect produced, followed it up accordingly; led thereunto by a somewhat faltering inquiry made by the lady, as to whether anybody would like to accompany her.

"Not I," said a gentleman with a red face at the end of the table. "I've heard of a traveller of rather a full habit of body, who went up, and whose head flew off with a bang, by reason of the rarefied air, just as he got to the top."

"Travellers are frequently frozen up," observed another. "I believe they show you, somewhere on the glacier, an entire boy's school from Geneva, shut up in the ice like flies in amber, or strawberries in a mould of jelly."

"Really one cannot help shuddering when one thinks of what happened to poor Mr. Wood," continued a lady. "His feet were frozen so, that he was obliged to sit for two days with them in snow and ice. And even that did no good, for in the end they both broke short off, as if he had been an image."

"And sometimes the fog freezes so hard, you can't get through it."

"And you lose your eyesight from the glare of the snow."

"And burst your blood-vessels from the exertion."

"And tumble into great holes in the glacier, never getting out again for four and twenty hours, and then coming up in the middle of the Lake of Geneva."

"And get butted by wild chamois."

"And pecked at by eagles."

"And carried off your legs by avalanches."

"And lose your footing to roll right down into Italy, like a football, never once stopping, except you pitch into a crevice."

All these comforting observations were made by the various guests; and Mrs. Hamper was, for the instant, shaken from her purpose. But her unconquerable love of going about—and the ascent of Mont Blanc was but a gadding upon a large scale—again prevailed, and she repeated her question as to the chance of finding a companion. But no one volunteered.

"But it is all paid for," she said. "It will not cost anything. The guides are retained, and must have their money. I think you said so, Edward; did you not?"

"Yes, aunt; somebody must pay."

"I shall have great pleasure in accompanying you, ma'am," said a voice from the bottom of the table.

"What, Christopher!" exclaimed Mr. Gudge, "you really think of going. Well, you are a brave fellow. Go, by all means." Then he added to himself, "and break your neck, and never be heard of any more!"

As Christopher spoke, the eyes of the entire company were immediately fixed upon him. Hitherto, from his modest and retiring manner, he had scarcely been noticed; but now that he had offered to accompany Mrs. Hamper, he directly became a lion. And then, when they regarded his slight but well-built frame, and regular, intelligent features, they began to wonder how it was that they had not observed him before. Mrs. Hamper directly caught at his offer, and it was immediately arranged that they should together make the attempt; against which Mr. Ellis did not say anything, feeling assured that the excursion would cure his aunt of all her wandering propensities—at least those on a grand scale. And so they retired to bed early, leaving directions with everybody concerned to be on the alert by six the next morning.

But few of them needed to be called; for the topmost peaks of the Aiguilles were scarcely tipped with the light of the sunrise, when the entire village was up and lively, excited by the rumour of the exploit. The very fowls entered into the general movement. They clustered about the hotel, and ran in and out, apparently with tidings of what was going on, and made important announcements to the world at large from the tops of palings and gables, and were as bustling as anybody assembled. All the guides, some six or seven in number, were in the inn-yard of the Hôtel de Londres, dividing their bundles, arranging the order in which they were to go, and allowing their pockets to be crammed with all kinds of presumed comforts by their

wives and families, many of whom were weeping, and indulging in loud lamentations, in the firm idea that their friends would never return. The boys also came out uncommonly strong, in suits of coarse cloth, more or less ventilated, and strange caps, only presumed to be such from seeing that they were things worn on the head; and between these, and the fowls, and mules, one continuous scuffle was maintained, as they increased the tumult by blowing horns of terrific make and power, and ringing cattle-bells, to waken the visitors at the hotel.

By half-past five not a soul was in bed. The novelty of a lady making the ascent was such, that even the guests at the other hotels came to see her off, to the great disgust of the proprietors, who were enraged that, even for the day, another establishment should be the centre of attraction. And when Mrs. Hamper emerged from her room, all prepared for travel—having put on a great coat over her usual attire—they gave such a cheer, that, more immediately under the mountain, it might have brought down an avalanche. Directly they proceeded to offer her flowers,—a custom originating more in pence than poetry; and then cheered her again, redoubling the noise when she got into the *chaise-à-porteurs* which was to carry her. For the old difficulty having arisen, of finding a mule sufficiently stalwart to bear her weight, and the early part of the journey being generally accomplished by riding, as far as practicable, to save the legs for what is to come, the guides had contrived a species of chair upon poles, into which Mrs. Hamper was placed, to the delight and admiration of the multitude. Christopher also attracted some attention. He was put down as an English nobleman—in common with all visitors to Chamouny; and when he vaulted on to his mule, as he would have played at leap-frog, putting his hands on the crupper, the people immediately conceived that to be the fashion in which the aristocracy of England usually got on their horses; and then they cheered again. Mr. and Mrs. Gudge accompanied the procession out of the village, as far as the first ascent through the pine wood at the edge of the glacier de Bossons; and Mr. Ellis ordered some of the peasants to carry him in what the children call a king-coach, (made by clasping each other's wrists) to the same point, considering this mode of transit would be better for his sprain. And indeed it was; for as soon as the travellers turned into the wood, he jumped off his conveyance, ran back again to Chamouny quite cured, and set off with his intended fellow-travellers of Mont Blanc, on an excursion to the "Jardin."

Meanwhile the party moved on—up, and up, and up, until Mrs. Hamper's porters panted and puffed like excursion-van-horses. One by one the amateurs, who accompanied the guides to carry their loads as far as was convenient, dropped behind; and by the time they got to the Pierre Pointue, where the path ends, very few of their companions remained.

And now the journey began in reality, as they crept along a pathway something like a gigantic mantelpiece, with a horrible abyss below, and got upon the *moraine* of the glacier—a sort of border, composed of bits of granite and dirty ice, the journey along which is very like

walking up hill along several miles of loose paving stones, in a freezing thaw—that state of apparent contradiction being the only one that assimilates to it. To Christopher it was nothing. With the aid of his pole, and the excitement derived from the mountain air, he jumped from one block to another, like a goat; but Mrs. Hamper found it more serious; indeed, it was only by being equally lifted, pushed, and carried by the guides, that she could make any way at all. But the thought of the figure she should cut at her dear Lady Parlawa's when she recounted her adventures in the winter, sustained her, and she contrived, at last, to get upon the solid body of the glacier.

Did you ever see a glacier? If not, fancy Holborn Hill paved with blocks of Wenham Lake ice; and even then you will have no idea of it. For you will miss its mighty chasms, rent in four hundred feet of blue ice; its glittering pinnacles, and chrystal domes; its streams of diamond water in their glassy channels: its ever-changing fantastic fairy architecture. Conventional travellers, whose ideas are formed by guide-books alone, which, in turn, copy from others written before, will tell you that a great glacier looks like the sea suddenly frozen in a storm. Do not believe them; there is not the slightest resemblance. But if you could call up in your mind a valley of white or bluish sugar candy, which a storm had, here and there, riven into fissures, that appeared to go to the centre of the earth, and in the depths of which you heard the rushing of mighty waters, and strange murmurs and unaccountable grumbings always going on, you may get some feeble notion of what a glacier is. And, as the cunning man observed, after selling the secret of some wonderful receipt, when you've got it all, it won't do.

On they went: Mrs. Hamper being impelled up one slope, and slipping down another, until they came to a mighty wall, which appeared to stop all further progress. But by some marvellous power of clinging to nothing, the head guide ascended with a rope followed by Christopher; and then they intimated to Mrs. Hamper that she must be drawn up after them.

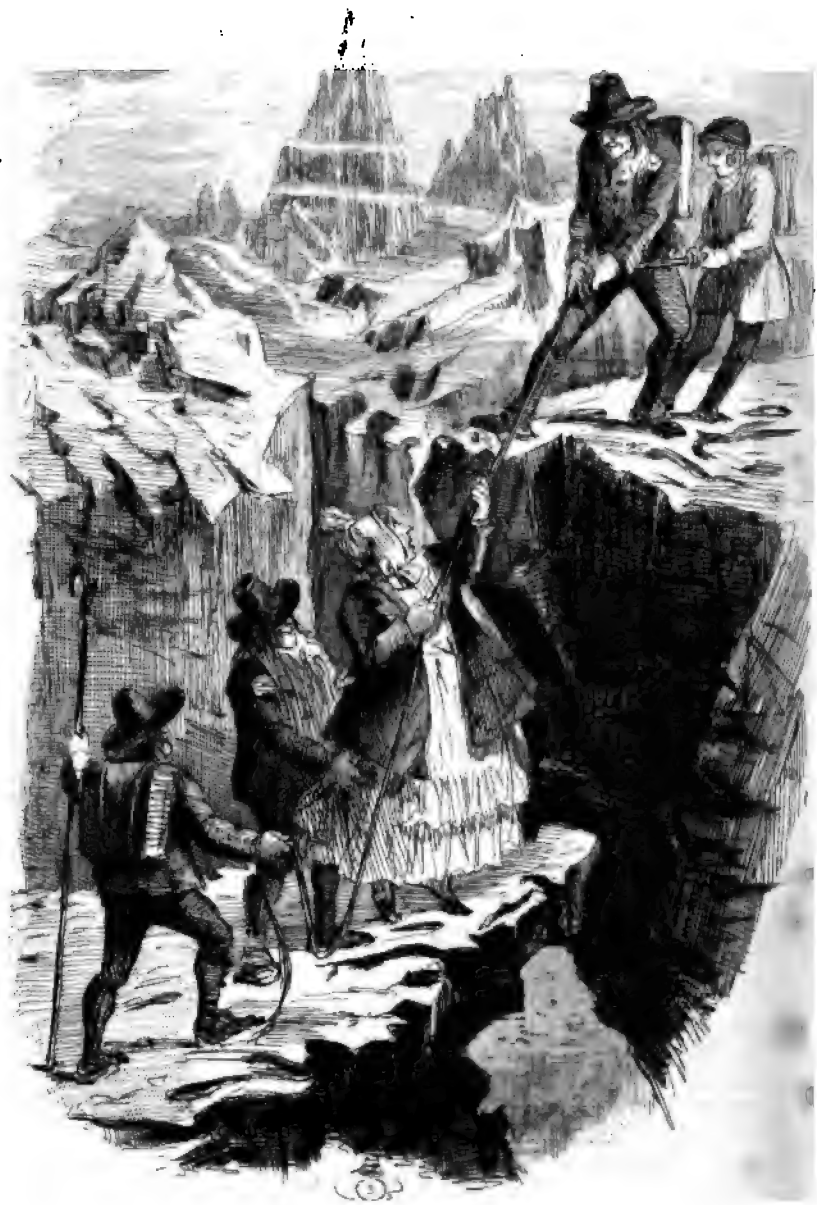
The good lady looked aghast. The rope was slight, and there were abysses below ending nowhere; but it was the only method; so she submitted, in exceeding terror, stipulating that they should stop when she was half-way up, to allow her to recover her senses. But there was no occasion for this arrangement. Long before she was half way up, the guides were fain to stop of their own accord.

"Now, my brave man," she said, "be sure you don't let go, whatever you do. And I must request that you won't look after me, because it is not at all well-behaved to do so, and will only make me nervous."

The guides touched their hats.

"I am quite ready;" continued the lady. "Stop! stop! deary me, there's that tiresome reticule, which is full of figs, as I've heard they are the best things—how annoying—gone into a hole, I declare. Now—stop—slowly at first, my good men."

And somewhat like the upward progress of a woolsack to the top



THE MOUNTAIN EXPEDITION.



floor of a Thames Street warehouse, did Mrs. Hamper revolve and rise in the air, until nearly half the height was accomplished.

"I'm sure you will let me down," she exclaimed, as they stopped. "Where am I? I daren't look. I've kept my eyes shut ever since I started, and don't think I shall open them again all the journey. Now do pray, get it over; there's excellent men!"

A few more stout pulls sufficed to bring Mrs. Hamper to the top of the barrier; but when she arrived there, she was so overcome with the exertion, and stifled with the constriction of the cord, that she could hardly speak. So they deposited her softly on the snow, and waited until she recovered; which she took a long time to do.

"If there is to be much more of this," she said, "I give up the journey. My object is to go up Mont Blanc, properly and respectably, as a lady ought to. Not to be pulled and hauled about like I don't know what."

So far she was right; it would have been difficult for anybody to have found an apt comparison to the appearance she presented.

The travellers went on—through blue caverns and up frosted hillocks, and over sparkling ridges, and round towering pinnacles; and the increasing toil of the journey was in some measure advantageous, as regarded Mrs. Hamper; since it kept her, for want of breath, from commencing long stories to Christopher about nothing, and asking innumerable useless questions of the guides. They did not get on very rapidly, though. Every fifty yards Mrs. Hamper insisted upon sitting down to rest upon a camp stool, which one of the men carried for her—a complicated instrument, that knocked you over when you opened it, and pinched your fingers when you closed it; and produced much distress, as its legs always poked down unequally into the snow, and shot the seater off whenever an attempt at rest was made. So that with all these troubles, it was late in the afternoon when they got to *Les Grands Mulets*, where they were to pass the night.

It was not a very inviting looking place. A vast cone of granite rose from the snow, which here never melted; and by climbing up this, very near the top, was a sort of shelf, whereon the guides fashioned a sort of tent with their poles, and tarpaulings carried up on their backs.

"But I can't get up *there*!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamper, as she looked despondingly at the route pointed out. "Dear me! that boy; I'm sure he will break his neck."

The last words referred to Christopher, who was leaping from one crag to another like a chamois, until he gained the top of the peak.

"Besides," she continued, "I am a woman of the world, and not particular; but really, we cannot all rest together; the idea—so very strange!"

It had never struck the simple-minded guides, that this objection might be made. They had never gone up with a lady before. Marie Coutet, the *belle* of Chamouni, had once made the ascent, and roughed it with them; but her father and brother were guides, and of the party. So they held a consultation. At last they agreed to build Mrs.

Hamper a private apartment of snow, all to herself, at the foot of the rock ; where they assured her she would be quite safe and comfortable, unless an avalanche came down ; and that was a thing nobody could guard against. And when they had done this, which, all working together, they accomplished in an incredibly short space of time, they prepared for supper.

Mrs. Hamper and Christopher became great friends ; and, indeed, during the two or three days he had been of their party, he had won upon her by his politeness ; for, having an intense dislike to Gudge, he had directed all his attention to Mrs. Hamper, and quite won her heart. Still the good lady could not make him out, not in any way understanding what social position he was supposed to hold ; and no answer to any of her inquiries tended to throw much light on the subject. So she did not, at last, trouble her head any more about it.

The supper was prepared ; and very delicious it was pronounced to be. The guides made a fire and mulled some wine ; and their knapsacks produced cold fowls and cheese, and figs, which were highly relished. Mrs. Hamper was prevailed on to take the smallest possible quantity in the world of brandy—to keep off the cold ; and the cold kept increasing so, as the sun went down, that she was compelled to repeat the dose, after which she began to talk to Christopher, finding it easier to speak English to him than French to the guides.

But as the day departed, the last rays of the sun rested upon them long after the greys of evening had crept over the world below ; and all the peaks above the level of perpetual snow glowed with rose-coloured light. Chamouny lay like a model at their feet ; and although daylight was still on them, they could see the lights appearing in the windows of the hotel, twinkling in the deep green channel of the valley ; and now and then heard the silvery bells of the mountain churches giving out the hour, above the distant murmur of cascades, constantly thawing from the glaciers, and the tinkling flocks that were going down from the pastures.

"This is truly splendid !" said Mrs. Hamper with enthusiasm. "Did you ever conceive anything so lovely ?"

"I never imagined such mountains until I came to Switzerland at all," replied Christopher, as he sat upon a jutting piece of the rock, cutting his name upon his mountain-pole. "I don't think those in England could be seen here."

No," said Mrs. Hamper : "but in Wales there are some not so contemptible."

"Have you been there ?"

"Oh yes ; but not for seventeen or eighteen years. It is a beautiful country ; but I have no wish to go again. No—no wish at all."

Mrs. Hamper said these words in so serious a tone, and shook her head so gravely, that Christopher's curiosity was excited. What could it be ? Surely, he thought, Mrs. Hamper had not been in love so lately as that !

"You have unpleasant recollections connected with the places there," he observed.

"All very bad—all very bad," said Mrs. Hamper, still shaking her head. "I had a niece, the most beautiful girl you ever saw,—sister to the gentleman who was with us at Chamouny, and who was to have come up Mont Blanc. She ran away from a school at Cheltenham with some villain, with whom, it appeared, a correspondence had been for some time going on; and we never saw her again. All we could learn was that his name was Edwards; and that they were supposed to have gone into Wales to live. I spent five or six months in trying to find them out—for she was my sister's child, and had neither father nor mother—and during that time there was scarcely a part of Wales that I did not visit."

"And you did not succeed."

"No—every clue was lost at last; and then I heard they had gone abroad. But we never knew what became of her. Poor thing! poor thing!"

After saying which, Mrs. Hamper appeared to be so lost in her own reminiscences, that Christopher went and joined the guides, who had collected round a fire, and were entertaining one another with anecdotes of the different ascents they had been engaged in.

The twilight came rapidly on, as the sunset glow departed; and they soon thought of betaking themselves to their resting places. A roof of poles and blankets was formed over the snow walls of Mrs. Hamper's temporary residence, and the brazier of charcoal was placed at her disposal, the greatest part of the straw which they had brought up, being also allotted to her. The others of the party then curled themselves up in small hollow places in the rock, with which they seemed to be previously acquainted; and they were all soon asleep, the lady of the party included, who, although in the same kind of apartment as one on which she had before passed a night on the Appeninnes, dropped off to rest more calmly, in the self-assurance that she had not brigands for her guardians.

But when they sounded the note of preparation to start in the morning, poor Mrs. Hamper's ancles—never of the slimmest—had enlarged to such a remarkable size, with her unwonted exertion, and were so inflamed, that all further proceeding was out of the question. The rarefaction of the air had also attacked her chest; and the long continued glare of the snow had affected her eyes; so that she was altogether perfectly disabled. And, indeed, it was not until Christopher had been down to Chamouny with some of the guides, and brought back a relay of villagers with slings and poles, and temporary remedies, that the poor lady could return, which she did, not without many struggles, and an inward vow, that as soon as she was recovered, she would make the attempt again. But this Mr. Ellis, whose own ancle had marvellously recovered, quietly prevented; by persuading Mr. Gudge to move on homewards as speedily as possible—which the lawyer was not sorry to do—with all of his party; whilst he stopped behind to carry out his own views with regard to Mont Blanc.

CHAPTER XL.

VARIOUS ADVENTURES AT VAUXHALL GARDENS.

It was a fortunate thing that as poor Bessy Payne sank down, crushed by Tom's fearful rage, the milkwoman arrived: otherwise he would have been terribly put to it to have known what course to take. And it was also fortunate that she knew them both, and that Tom could explain—he scarcely did so, though in a few hurried words—the cause of their quarrel. The milkwoman told him “not to take on so,” and could not believe what he said—no, not if he was to go down upon his knees and swear it; which in his excitement he was nearly doing. Then, taking up Bessy's key, which had fallen on the pavement, and opening her door she carried the poor little girl in, and told Sprouts that now she was all right, he had better go home and leave them; and that she would look after her; and that it would be all made up, she was sure. No—Tom was resolved it never should be—never; but he told the woman to take great care of her, and then, quite bewildered, and not knowing what to do, he went back to his shop and took down the shutters, looking so ghastly and bewildered, that it was fortunate it was so early, or else if any of his romance-readers had come they might have taken him for a real spectre, instead of the legendary ones, whose habits and manners they were enabled to study at a penny a day.

He did not care any more for Bessy—of course not; and yet, poor fellow, when he had opened his shop, he sat down and watched her window, and wondered what made the stupid milkwoman so long before she came out again, and was once or twice actually on the point of going over to see. At last she appeared, and next clanked her pails down at Tom's door.

“I've made her go to bed,” said the woman. “She would not, though, until she had made me promise to come over and speak to you.”

“Oh!” replied Tom; “just as you please. What did she want?”

He said this with the lightest unconcern: and yet for every word he expected to hear, he would have given, over and over again, everything that he possessed in the world.

“She said that you were not to judge her until she had explained everything: and that she was as innocent as the day.”

“Pshaw!” answered Sprouts, with a wretched single laugh: “innocent! yes, I dare say. Ah! it's all over.”

He drank off the measure of milk which the woman gave him, and bidding her good bye, shut the door to stop all further conversation: because he felt that he wanted to ask a dozen questions about Bessy, but would not demean himself by doing it. As soon as the woman was gone, he went into his little room, and leaning his head upon

the table, relieved his overladen heart by a violent and bitter flood of tears.

Bessy's blind remained down until the morning was far advanced. The poor girl—worn out, jaded and distressed—had happily fallen into a heavy sleep from pure exhaustion: and all the coquettish caps and buckram bonnets, and fashionably-dressed-in-silver-paper dolls were veiled from the public gaze until a very unwonted hour. Long, however, before their attractions were allowed to break upon the inmates of the court, Tom had got somebody to mind his shop, and, with all his indifference, rushed off to Mr. and Mrs. Chirpey to communicate with them on the subject.

Fortunately Mrs. Chirpey was at home, appointing an army of buttons to different destinations on her husband's apparel, and weaving webs on and about a pile of stockings in a basket before her, as she also watched baby, who was making a tour about the floor, trying to hold on hard by the pattern of the carpet, or picking up ultimate atoms which its eyes must have been microscopes to discover. She saw at once, as Sprouts entered, that something was the matter; but, that Bessy was the cause, never entered her head. And therefore when Tom explained, in as few words as possible, all that had taken place, as she was as much astonished and alarmed as he had been. It was so very odd—so entirely different to what she knew of Bessy's character, and she had known her from a child—that Mrs. Chirpey could scarcely reply to Tom's anxious questions of what it could have been, and what he was to do; for he appeared quite to forget that if he could not solve them, Mrs. Chirpey could scarcely be expected to. But in asking advice, he only sought concurrence with his own suppositions, or approval of his conduct; and a very great many of us do the same.

But whilst they were talking, there was a little timid fluttering knock at the door: so gentle that the comer appeared to look upon the knocker as a percussion cap, and was afraid of its going off with a bang; just that knock which any one living in chambers likes to hear—merely, of course, from its being tranquil and quiet, and not disturbing study. Quiet as it was, however, Sprouts knew it. You would not imagine a knocker was an instrument capable of much expression upon first thoughts; but yet its gamut of feelings from the bass of assurance to the treble of indecision is as clearly marked, and distinct in its sound, as the whole range of musical notes.

For there is the thundering knock of independence, the giver of which cares no more for you than if you were under the rapper: and the presuming knock of the one who does look up to you, but don't wish you to think so: and the social knock that sounds, somehow or other, like a warm shake of the hand: and the cold-blooded knock, that is like a shake of the hand also, but when you grasp four limp fingers. There is also the bold single knock that has you in its power, either with a bill, a parcel, or a poor's-rate: and the mistrustful double one, that is undecided as to its position; and the sharp hurried government summons of the postman; and the apprehensive tap of the industrious mechanic who leaves the steel-pens, soap, and sealing-wax, which he will

call again for if you don't purchase—a crouching knock meant, of course, to reach the servant's ears, but apparently anxious not to do so, for fear of offending them. And, worst of all, there is the miserable sneaking tap-tap—or rather the tap with a faint echo—of the visitor, who, you know, will leave his hat in the passage and come with an apology for intruding on your time, taking it up with a weak story which will end in requesting some trifling assistance. This last is the knock of feeble-minded imposition; and is always associated with topless gloves, a buttoned-up coat and much rubbing of shoes.

"That's her!" cried Sprouts, turning quite pale, as he started from his chair. "What shall I do? I don't want to meet her. What can she have come here for?"

The answer was too palpable to induce the necessity of giving it. So Mrs. Chirpey did not take the trouble, to the great disappointment of Tom; who, although he knew what it would be, would still have felt comforted on hearing it: but she told him to go into another room, whither he retired, very nervous and indecisive, whilst Bessy Payne—for it was the little milliner—was admitted.

How everything was explained, and how much more crying there was than was at all necessary on Bessy's part, until Mrs. Chirpey cried too—not exactly knowing why, but women suffer from the complaint very much: how Tom listened to every word through the key-hole, and was only kept from rushing out and hugging Bessy beyond all propriety by a strong sense of moral dignity, can, like newspaper violent emotion, be better imagined than explained. But we can tell how he hated himself for having behaved as he had done—how cordially he accused himself of being a brute, when after all it had been Bessy's kindness of heart that he had rewarded by calling her a terrible name, and making her undergo such unmerited misery. And when he thought how wretched she must have been in her little room—that was generally such a cheerful one—since the morning, he had a lower opinion of himself than ever.

But at last Mrs. Chirpey called him: and then he thought he should not compromise his dignity at all by joining them; and he nearly broke the door down in his hurry to do so. Bessy did not scream at his appearance, for Mrs. Chirpey had contrived to let her know by various pantomimical signs that Sprouts was there; but she ran towards him and cried:—

"Oh Tom! how could you be so unkind, and think—"

What he had thought must remain a mystery, for Sprouts replied in a manner so peculiar, that Bessy's lips were not able to say another word, and it is quite wonderful that Mrs. Chirpey was not shocked. Baby evidently was; and having regarded them with a scared but intent expression for a few minutes, began to cry loudly, (in which manner a baby's fixed attention usually ends) until the mother took it up, and was so occupied in dancing it into breathless quietude, that she had no time to look after anybody else.

However, a perfect reconciliation was effected; and as if a good fairy had watched over the whole proceedings, Mr. Chirpey returned to

dinner almost at that minute; and being frowned and otherwise telegraphed by his wife, into not inquiring what all the red eyes and confused manner of his friends meant, did not put any troublesome questions, but said what was much more agreeable—that all his advertising vans had been engaged for a week by some bold speculator, in consequence of which, he intended to give them a treat, and would take the entire party, either to Astley's or Vauxhall—whichever place they chose to go to—in commemoration of the event.

It was a joyful choice to make; for there are few of us who do not look forward with pleasure to going to either one resort or the other; the only difficulty was in deciding which should have it, the elephants and horses, or the fireworks and cold fowls. All were alike fascinating.

We ourselves enjoy an Eastern spectacle at Astley's, because it sets our Indian Empire before us as we believe it to be; not as cold travellers—if such they can be in those climes—would lead us to think it is. We have implicit reliance upon the Astley's authorities, either in matters of dress, manners, or scenery connected with Asiatic affairs generally; and we always read the playbill, on these occasions, as though it were the Trieste or Marseilles overland mail. We have always conceived Calcutta to be a city entirely of platforms and terraces, whose inhabitants, without one exception, wear spangled dresses and foil helmets. We believe that magnificent processions—to which that of Blue Beard was a mere deputation, throng the streets all day long; that the bang of drums and clash of cymbals sounds perpetually, and that the Bayaderes are such as we have seen at the play in the "Maid of Cashmere." These things have been impressed upon us ever since we first went to Astley's; at a time when we conceived the Clown to be always as we then and there saw him, even in his own house, if he indeed had one. Of this we had always doubts. We rather inclined to the belief that he was some species of supernatural part and parcel of the sawdust, as a Dryad would be of the entire tree; and that he never went out of the arena. We do not wish to be undeceived with respect to these things. We rejoice—silently, but deeply—to find that stage illusion has still some little power over us, and we would not have the spell broken. For this we love a visit to Astley's, now and then: like roast pig, we do not think we could stand it continuously: but occasionally we deem it a high treat, especially if our excitement is as much worked up as that of the most expectant boy in the gallery, or ruddy-looking servant-maid by the side of the soldier in the pit, into whose arms be sure that the Merryman will jump, when pursued by the pony. And in the equestrian drama the final triumph of virtue over the machinations of vice offers a gratifying *dénouement* to the well-regulated minds of the audience. For there is an elevated moral feeling in the sentiments of the frequenters at Astley's. If the rightful heir—and there always is one—was to be finally wronged, no one might answer for the consequences.

But for Vauxhall, apart from the attractions of a summer *al fresco* place of amusement, there is always something very refreshing in a visit

to its Gardens ; for it revives old associations, more than any place of the kind about London. Who does not recollect his first visit there, when, on emerging from the gloomy ins and outs of the entrance—the imperfect clash of the brass band raising the pulse of expectation and excitement all the time, and betokening what revelry was already going on within—the brilliant vistas with their “twenty-thousand additional lamps” first burst upon the view ? Until then, the splendour of the Arabian Nights’ Entertainments had only been pictured with a magnificence depending upon the powers of imagination of the reader ; but after this the glories waiting upon the careers of Nouredin, Camaralzamem, Ali Baba, the Calendars, Prince Bahman, Codadad, and all the rest of our old friends, could be readily conjured up. The night palaces so gorgeously lighted up—the wonderful music—and the dancing slaves, became so many Vauxhalls, peopled with coryphæes and brass bands, and pitched upon the twinkling banks of the Tigris instead of the Thames.

Vauxhall is a perennial, whose progress we always watch with interest. Summer goes by, and its glories fade ; its fruits—which are the lamps—are gathered, and the whole place becomes a dismal waste. We can imagine nothing more sadly dreary than the view of Vauxhall in the midst of January, when the snow is on the ground. At that time whispers are always promulgated that Vauxhall is “to be built upon.” We look at the hapless orchestra, seen through the skeleton trees, as a doomed thing : the very sight of the wooden porticos, with their remnants of placards relating to past festivity, is depressing : and the hazardous scaffolding of the daring gentleman, who, all on fire, shoots down the rope, with its winter-beaten forlorn flag, is regarded with a sense of ghastliness almost akin to that with which, in former times, we used to look at the gibbets which had whilom held the men in chains opposite Blackwall. Anon as Whitsuntide comes round again, we hear that there is to be “another last season ;” and Vauxhall springs up again, as gay as a fuchsia, that had been cut down for hybernation. The lamps bud out again upon their accustomed wires ; the hermit returns to life ; and the brass band once more wakes the echoes of the promenades and dark walks. And then we find that the gardens are still “a great fact ;” and have not been desecrated into dwellings for luxuriating clerks, or vinegar, chimney-tile, or composite-candle manufactories. We have all pleasant associations connected with Vauxhall ; we would not willingly exchange our own for dearer reminiscences of things far more important in the romance of life. It is at least pleasant when jaded, baited, and spirit-wearied, to think that there was a time when we regarded the aforesaid twenty thousand additional lamps, not as little glass vessels with smoky wicks, and common oil within, but as terrestrial stars, lighted by fairy hands, and fitted only to shed their radiance around as did the dazzling and tempting fruit of Aladdin’s subterranean garden.

Vauxhall carried the day—or rather the night ; Tom suggesting that Astley’s came to a close with its last glare of red fire, but that Vauxhall was never over, as you might stay as long as you liked :

indeed, he did not believe that a last man ever came away. Besides, more than all that, the little girl had never been there. So he went back with Bessy—who was so happy, and sobbing, and arm-pressing, and eye-glistening, and smiling, that it was quite delightful to see her—and having made arrangements for an early closing movement on his own account, and once more got out the smart clothes he intended to have worn the night before, they returned back to tea at Mr. Chirpey's.

They found the jolly man amongst his advertising vans, superintending the pasting of some placards upon "*The Gasper*," which was going forth to the world, on the morrow, with a new speculation. Bessy went up to Mrs. Chirpey to have a talk, and nurse baby; and Sprouts and the jolly man sat down together on a bit of timber.

"Here's another failure getting ready," said the jolly man. "It can't stand, for necessity has no legs, as they say. Somebody else going in for 'the People.' Another newspaper. Hooray! What a lot of friends the poor man will have."

"What's this?" said Sprouts, reading the bill. "'A frying-pan and fire-irons.'"

"Yes, that's it," said the jolly man. "Every subscriber for a month to 'The Engine of the Masses,' is entitled to a frying-pan, when he pays his subscription in advance. And every customer for a quarter, is to have a set of fire-irons. I shouldn't wonder if they went the entire kitchen, for a year."

"I dare say it's all right," said Tom. "But what's the use of those things by themselves? They'd better give away a leg of mutton and a sack of coals."

"That's what I say," said the jolly man: "all the rest's regular tantalizing. But it's just the same in their writings. What's the good of making 'the People' believe that they're great cards, if they've got nothing to carry out the notion with. It's as bad as leading them on to tumble into a lake, by persuading them they can fly, when they can't, nor anything like it. Ah! it's all of a piece. I say, Ritchins."

A man, who was putting up the bills, answered to the name.

"Mind you have the money every night for the vans. I know the philanthropic folks of old. The only time I ever got done out of my rent, was when a lot of them hired my workshops, and called it a National Palladium, for lectures on the 'Rights of Man,' and 'Progress.' 'Progress,' indeed! They all went fast enough at last; clean away, and forgot my rights. 'Tisn't a bad move, though. If I was a scribbler, beginning life, I'd go in for the same line of business."

Just then Mrs. Chirpey made a signal from the parlour-window, which overlooked the yard, that tea was ready: so the jolly man and Sprouts dropped the subject, and went into the house.

At length it got dusk; and starting with the first shades of twilight, the happy party stood at the portals of the gardens, Bessy scarcely speaking for expectation, but holding fast hold of Sprouts, as she knew she was going to see something very wonderful, but of which she had

not the least idea. And then they passed, first along the lobby, which, with its money-takers and sawdust, looked something between a box entrance and a wild beast show; and next, the gloomy trellised passage, until they turned round the black screen, and saw the gardens before them in all their variegated splendour. Bessy was quite faint with the sight that burst upon her; beyond an exclamation of surprise, she could utter not a word.

Such hundreds of thousands of lights! such beautiful balloon-chandeliers, and flags, and crowns! such looking-glass and lamps, and lovely promenades, going far away into the distance, until all the stars that arched over them got confused in one dazzling flash. And such a lady singing too, in such a hat! the like of it was not to be met with in any fashion-book that had ever been invented. It was too much! And as they led her on, every step brought forward fresh objects. Plashing fountains that sparkled in the light, and snowy statues gleaming from amidst the cool dark foliage; and snug bowers and supper-boxes, and secluded walks; and elegant company and military bands. It was a great deal too much!

Presently a bell rung, and all the company flocked to the spot the sound came from, which was the Rotunda. There was to be a ballet on the stage, and some horsemanship in the arena: and to see this there was such a crowd, that Bessy was almost alarmed, and Mrs. Chirpey begged the jolly man not to attempt it; as if anything was to happen she would never forgive herself, no, not to the latest day of her death. But Sprouts protected Bessy, and Mr. Chirpey stood like a bulwark close to his wife; so that when the doors opened, they were carried in right up to the barrier of the circus, hemmed in by the crowd.

"Oh! my goodness, Tom!" cried Bessy, somewhat agitated; "pray come away. I've just seen somebody."

"No!" exclaimed Sprouts, not exactly knowing what she meant. "Well, considering there's nobody here, I wonder at that. Who is it?"

"Look there—in that box," replied Bessy.

Tom followed her eyes, and immediately perceived the gentleman who had brought Bessy home in the cab that morning. As he told Mrs. Chirpey afterwards, he felt his heart turn right round inside him.

Young Sir Frederick Arden had got on a white coat, with huge sleeves and buttons, and was smoking a cigar as he leant over the front of the box, and chaffed the people as they passed, or talked to one or two raffish young men, who were with him; first calling the general attention of the company to his party by putting his fingers in his mouth, and giving a whistle, that would have done honour to any gallery in London.

"Now, then!" he cried, "music! Strike up there, you fellows. What do you think you're paid for?"

There was a great laugh in the box at this humorous outburst. Sir Frederick was evidently going to stand treat for the supper.

"I had such a lark last night," he continued, in a loud tone, when

he saw he had attracted the notice of the company. "I went down to Nick Mawley's, and put on the gloves with the Brummagen Clinker, and knocked him about so that he scarcely knew where he was."

"I thought you were at Richmond, Fred," said one of his friends.

"Oh! ay—yes; what, with Fanny Hamper? Ah! that was afterwards."

"How about the little milliner, too, eh?" continued the friend. "Wasn't it fun?"

Poor Bessy! she heard every word, and thought she should have dropped.

"Fun! I should think so: just a few, screamish, rayther. Stunning fright she was in, too, all the way; Fanny told me, she was afraid of 'her young man' knowing of it. Some damned counter-jumping snob, I suppose. I wish he did, and was to come to me about it, I'd polish him off."

"Oh! Tom, don't; pray, pray, don't; for my sake," cried Bessy, in a low voice, but with great earnestness, to Sprouts, who was buttoning up his coat across his chest, turning up his cuffs, putting his hat tighter on his head, and going through other preparations, which betokened the approach of an ordeal by battle.

"Oh!" said Sprouts in return, "I suppose you don't want me to spoil his beauty."

And he said this rather spitefully.

"Now, for shame, Tom—for shame!" replied Bessy. "I declare I will go and walk with Letty and Mr. Chirpey, if you go on so."

"What right has he to call me a counter-jumping snob, then? I never jumped over a counter in my life; not but what I could though, if I chose."

"Of course, you could, Tom."

"Well, then, I'm not going to be insulted," said Sprouts, still turning up his cuffs almost to his elbows.

"But, my dear Tom; you know you don't fight. Bless you for it, too. I am sure you would get hurt so, if you did. Now, what is the use of making one so miserable, after you promised nothing more should be said about it."

"I'll serve him out yet, though," said Sprouts, as he turned round, half drawn by Bessy, towards the arena.

Sir Frederick Arden was still talking.

"I don't care who it is," he went on; "but I'll take anybody of my own weight, with or without gloves. They wanted me to go to Brussels, and challenge all Belgium last year, one down and tother come on. I've got such a match coming off though, next month."

"What's that?"

"I've bet eight hundred to fifty that I row a mile, swim a mile, hop a mile, ride a mile, run blind-folded a mile, walk backwards a mile, throw the Truro Bantam, lick the Tipton Slasher, shoot eleven pigeons out of twelve, pick up two dozen penny rolls with my teeth, and eat six new Bath buns, all within the hour. I'll do it, too."

Just then the bell rang for the performance to begin, and the people

who wished to see it, cried out "order!" and "silence!" These commands were repeated back again by Sir Frederick ; and then he was quiet.

The ballet was not very elaborate ; intricacy of plot and stage effect are not looked for at Vauxhall. There were two young lovers, an old rival, and a mother ; with obliging villagers, who came on at any time when they were wanted to express such approbation or admiration of the proceedings as they were required to do : and after the old rival had experienced a very uncomfortable time of it, the young lovers were ultimately made happy. In this there was not a great deal, but the girl who played the daughter was so very handsome, that she attracted all eyes towards her the instant she appeared on the stage ; and amongst the earliest those of young Sir Frederick and his party.

"I say—that's not so bad, Arden," observed one of his friends.

"Not at all," replied the young Baronet, "who is she ? I wonder the people here didn't mention her to me, never mind—I'll find out, I'm sure I have seen her before."

And he left the box, amidst an interchange of jokes, and allusions, and equivoques which may be omitted with advantage.

"Why, Tom," said Bessy : "that's the girl that we saw at Greenwich, I am sure, with the show people. And—my goodness me!—if that isn't Professor Fandango playing the old gentleman in the wig. Well, if ever I should have known him!"

"You're quite right Bessy ; it's Patsy, sure enough."

"Yes, it's Patsy," said a man in a groom's dress, who at this moment came round inside the circus with a rake. "Hope I see you well Mr. Chirpey," he continued touching his hat to the jolly man : "and your good lady, and all at home."

"What ; Skittler!" cried Mr. Chirpey.

"Josh it is, as I'm alive," exclaimed Sprouts. "Why we are meeting all our own friends."

"Hush, Tom," said Skittler ; "I'm supposed to be a foreigner here. You'll see me come down a rope bye and bye, covered all over with squibs. The old story you know ; anything to turn a penny. Ginger-beer wouldn't get up, anyhow, and the Tagglony wore out at last, so the Professor got me this berth. I rake the sawdust, hold the hoops, do the 'terrific descent,' and make myself generally useful."

"That's right," said Mr. Chirpey : "but we must have a glass of something together, for old acquaintance, eh ? shall we go out now. Tom will look after the ladies."

"Not now, sir, thank'ee," said Skittler. "But I don't mind after the fireworks. If you'll go to one of the supper boxes on the right of the doors here, and enquire for the name of Hickory, he's a waiter and'll make you very comfortable. I must get on though."

And he went round the circus smoothing the sawdust with marvellous rapidity, until the ballet concluded and the horsemanship commenced.

It was the same as usual ; as ever has been, and to all appearances

ever will be. Gentlemen in fleshings leapt over striped bits of canvass, stooping under them half a dozen times before they made up their minds to do it; and ladies put themselves in fascinating attitudes with floating scarves; and the clown insulted the master of the ring and got whipped; and two Olympians held one another up by the waists on a couple of bare-backed steeds; and all the time-honoured programme was gone through to the great satisfaction of everybody. When it concluded, the concert began again, and the company once more sought the walks. Mr. Chirpey proposed that they should sup before the fireworks, and everybody being quite ready to do so, they took possession of a box, where Skittler had recommended them.

Hickory was the waiter also patronized by Professor Fandango, who had great interest at Vauxhall, but the party did not recognize him, having only met him once before, in the booth at Greenwich. Elsewise his dress did not alter him much, with the exception that he had laid aside his cocked hat and umbrella; for his coat was still scarlet, as of old, although without the trimmings. He took the orders for a fowl, and ham, and some salad; for, mind you, Mr. Chirpey meant to do it in style. And then there were two jugs of darkly foaming stout set on the table that refreshed one even to look at. And when the other things came, they had great fun.

For the jolly man shewed the fowl to the old waiter and told him he had brought a lark by mistake, and when the old waiter said that parties generally came there for larks, they laughed so, that the most exquisite joke ever made never produced such merriment. And next, when Mr. Chirpey took a transparent slice of ham upon his fork and held it to his eye, saying he could see through all their tricks, they laughed again, and still more when he inquired how many miles of plates he could make one ham cover. And then he joked about the wooden cruet-stands, and the red coats, and the knives and forks, and all so good-temperedly, that the old waiter quite forgot his other customers, who shouted in vain for tumblers and bread, until they gave up in exhaustion.

They were all falling to, when Tom suddenly became silent as he observed Sir Frederick Arden walking backwards and forwards, quite alone, in front of their box. He alone saw it: Bessy did not, for she was eating and drinking and laughing, and thinking what a Paradise Vauxhall was, all at once. And the young Baronet never even glanced into the box: indeed he did not appear to know that they were there, but still kept on his march, now and then looking towards a small door near the bar of the gardens. Sprouts did not mention this, but kept his eye upon him.

At last he saw the door open, and a girl, whom he immediately recognized to be Patsy, came out. Sir Frederick went towards her, and as she emerged into the light of the grounds made a bow, which, being somewhat unexpected, caused the little dancer to fall back under the shadow of the passage. But he caught her by the arm, and pulling her forward, said:—

"Don't go away. I wish to speak to you."

"I don't know you," cried the girl, terrified. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"Hush! I have told you what I want. You have met me before—one night, you know, in the public house—Mawley's—when that old muff with you would interfere."

"Let me go!" cried Patsy, "you hurt my arm—let me go!"

"Oh! stuff, nonsense!" replied Sir Frederick. "Come—I'm sure we shall be better friends when you know me. Let us take a walk round the gardens. Won't you? Oh! Very well—then you *shall*!"

He seized her roughly as he spoke, and drew her arm within his, as the girl perceiving the old waiter, cried out, "Hickory! Hickory! come here!"

But before he moved a young man darted across the walk, and with two blows released the girl from her persecutor. The first made him leave go his hold, and the second knocked him backwards, right on to the table in the box where Mrs. Chirpey and company had assembled. The assailant was Christopher!

"Halloo!" cried the jolly man: "that's one way of coming to supper. You don't belong to our party. Get off!"

Standing up, he seized the young Baronet by his collar, and hoisted him on to his legs in an instant, as a crowd began to assemble on the walk in front of the box.

Sir Frederick Arden seized an empty stout bottle, and hit a desperate blow at the head of his assailant; with such force that the glass broke, and the other's face was directly covered with blood. But he was not cowed. On the contrary he rushed at him with redoubled force, and began to use his fists with terrible earnestness, amidst cries of "police!" the upsetting of tumblers and wine-glasses; the encouragement of the men, and the screams of the ladies. The combatants were, to all appearances, so nearly matched, that nobody interfered to stop them.

At last a policeman made his appearance, with the proprietor of the grounds, and stood between the pugilists.

"Mr. Hughes," said the young Baronet hastily. "You know me—Sir Frederick Arden: I give this fellow into charge for assaulting me."

"Who struck the first blow?" asked the policeman.

"I did," said the stranger: "and it served him right."

"And who are you?" asked young Arden, looking up and down him, with a sneering inspection.

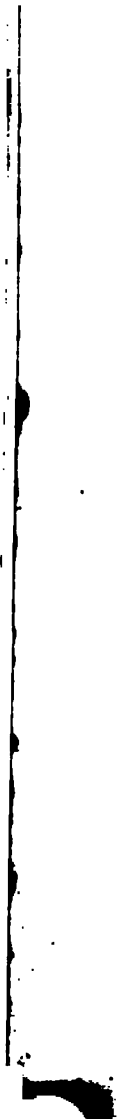
"My name's Christopher Tadpole—I'm not ashamed of it."

As he gave his name, something comical in its sound, appeared to tickle the people about, for they laughed loudly. Some at the same time doubted it; and did not conceal their opinions.

"Ask the waiters if I am not right. I know one of them."

"You look as if you did;" replied Sir Frederick Arden.





He said this in such an insulting tone, that Christopher was about to fly at him again, when the policeman dragged him back.

"Take him away, I tell you; walk the blackguard off to the jug;" said the young Baronet. "I give him in charge."

"I don't think he was to blame, from what I saw of the matter," observed Mr. Chirpey, speaking for the first time.

"And who the devil cares whether you think so, or no;" replied Sir Frederick. "Off with him at once."

"Off with him, huzzah!" cried the mob, as the policeman took Christopher by the collar, and marched him out of the gardens; followed by the crowd, who, as one of the parties was a Baronet, and the other a nobody knew who, did not appear inclined to take the latter's part.

When they got outside the gates, they were alone. Another policeman then joined the party; and two or three idlers, who loitered round the doors, seeing Christopher's bleeding face, ran after him, until they came to the station-house.

They passed the wicket, and were ushered into a bare, cheerless room, surrounded by benches, on one or two of which the same number of guardians of the night were idly lolling, in expectancy of a new arrival. In the middle of the circle, stood a short, square-built, dirty boy, who had just been brought in on suspicion of having stolen a pewter pot, which he had been found marching about the streets with, "going for some beer for his mother," as he told the policeman. But as his notions with respect to the maternal residence, or the tavern he intended to honour with his custom, were alike vague and unsatisfactory, he had been requested to stop on his way.

The night-inspector occupied an enclosed closet, something like the money-taker's box at a theatre, with a similar pigeon-hole in front, that shut with a small door, as the pre-paid aperture does at a post-office. As soon as the policeman entered with Christopher, one of his fellows tapped at the door, which was immediately opened.

"What's the charge?" said the constable, as he peered from his nook.

"Being drunk, assaulting the police, and using abusive language," replied the other, all in a breath, as though he had said so a few times before in his life.

"Why—what do you mean?" asked Christopher, quite astonished at the charge. "It's a lie."

"Come, none of that," said the policeman, seizing him by the collar and shaking him. "That's the charge, Sir," he continued to the constable.

"Very well," returned the other, shutting the door, whilst he took a few whiffs of his pipe, drank a small portion of a pot of stout, and looked on the ground after his pens, both of which he had trodden upon and given long splits to.

"Pleeceman!" screamed a shrill voice from the lock-up cells.

"She's at it again," remarked one of the division, who was sitting

on a bench at the fire, with his hands clasped together, his head hanging down, and his elbows resting on his knees, like a medical man at a lingering case, trying to persuade himself that he's going to sleep.

"Pleeceman!" screamed the voice again, "this young woman's a-dying; s'elp me Peel, she's a-dying!"

"Do you mean to keep quiet or not?" said the policeman, going to the door of the 'jug, and giving it a rattle that would have frightened the minister himself, had he been there to lend the solicited assistance.

"No," replied the voice; "I mean to enjoy myself, and be happy. What's the odds if you isn't? Creeping where no what is it, is seen, a rare old plant—."

"Silence!" interrupted the policeman, in stentorian accents. There was a momentary lull, and then the voice began again, pouring forth a series of mournful sounds as well as strange noises, something between a recitative and a hiccup, until it appeared to be suddenly interrupted, and then another temporary quiet was obtained.

"Now, Sir—what's your name?" said the inspector, as he added to the policeman, "See what he has in his pockets."

The man proceeded to search Christopher, who submitted passively. He took out a silk handkerchief, some silver, and a foreign gold watch.

"Swell mob," said the inspector to himself, as these things appeared. "And what's that?"

The policeman pulled out a little leather bag from our hero's side pocket.

"Don't take that," said Christopher. "It cannot be of the least use to you. It only contains a lump of salt, that I have had many years."

"Lump of salt indeed," observed the constable, as he opened it, and turned the dirty crystal about in his hand. "That's not salt; no, no—there's something more in this than you choose to tell. Put it with the rest, and lock him up in the cell."

Perfectly bewildered, and not allowed to say a word in remonstrance, Christopher was conducted by the policeman to the small dungeon; and having been there deposited, was now left in the dark. The blow on the head, the pain, and loss of blood had so exhausted him, and confused his ideas, that he fell almost directly into a kind of stupor, with his back against the wall, in spite of the yells and screeches, the drunken squabbles and hysterical moanings, that broke forth around him.

It was broad daylight—at least as broad as daylight can be in such straitened circumstances—when he awoke again to the consciousness of his wretched position, in the most hapless state of head-ache and despondency. A few individuals of the lowest order of society were lying about on the floor, like so many animals, snoring heavily, or staring, with semi-apoplectic gaze, at the loophole that admitted the light. The only one who appeared at his ease was the boy who had

stolen the pewter, and he was looking about him with something that amounted to a grin; far different to the aspect he had assumed a few hours before, when in the presence of the inspector and his force.

"Was you ever in this jug afore?" he asked, addressing himself to Christopher, who appeared to be the only one capable of attending to him.

"No, never—never!" replied his companion in misery.

"Ah! but you've bin in others I'll lay a penny," continued the boy. "Which do you likes the best on 'em?"

"I tell you I never was in one before," answered Christopher.

The other young gentleman received the assertion with an incredulous stare, and a short convivial double-shuffle hobnail dance. After which he winked, whistled the chorus of "Hot Codlins," with a grimace after the manner of Mr. T. Matthews, turned head over heels backwards, and resumed his place upon the floor.

"Ah!" he added, after a moment's pause, "I should think so—not at all neither. You was never bonnet to a speeler, at Egham races now—was you? Oh no!"

He uttered the two last words in an octave, and winked again. After that he fumbled in a pocket, which appeared to take up the whole of his trowsers, and produced two bits of slate—the bones were scarcely in the dawn of their popularity—on which he performed a triumphal street cachucha, in the pride of his penetration. But he was evidently taking his companion for somebody else, who had formerly aided the designs of the "speeler"—the name by which the *fungi* of the turf recognize the very full bloom ladies in the heavy bonnets, who used to stand under umbrellas, and announce "many thousands of pounds to be given away"—who had waggon-loads of wealth just come in, and expected fresh ones every minute. Who said, "Keep off our gold, our silver we do not vally;" and were so unceasing in their application to the company generally, "to venture the first lucky shilling, win a prize, and give the table a fair name."

"I've tried every jug in London," continued the boy, after a short pause, with a candour that was really charming. "I've tried 'em all, and don't know which is wusser of the rest. Queen Square's the best, p'rhaps, cos it ain't so cold. What are you in for—salting the crushers, didn't they say?"

"Something like it," replied Christopher, making a shot at the meaning.

"Ah!" the boy went on; "that's always a okkard business."

"What do you think they'll do with me, then?" asked Christopher, who began to regard his new acquaintance in the light of a great authority in punishments.

"Oh—they won't hang you yet," replied the boy; "they don't do that until they find nothing else is of use. It isn't often though they hang now. Lor! the sprees I've had at the executions! When Tom Spires was hung for shooting the keeper, he never split upon the others as was with him—no, not though they tried all they could do—Lord Mayor, and parsons, and the whole biling of 'em. We went to

see him off, and hurrah him : and so we did—give him a good 'un just as he fell. I'm sure he heard it. He died regular game ; bowed to the three sides of the scaffold, and had a daisy in his mouth—that he had !”

And here the boy's face lighted up with the exciting recollection of the occurrence, as he went through an imitative performance of bowing, with his hands pinioned, and then made a “click” with his tongue, and threw his head on one side, in a perfect transport of recollection.

“But what will they do with me ?” asked Christopher, repeating his question.

“Oh ! you won't be hung, I tell you ;” said the boy, “though if you was to, we'd come and see you through it right enough. A month on the mill's nearer the mark.”

“The treadmill !” exclaimed Christopher ; “you don't mean that. What the deuce could I do, if I was there ?”

“Do what most of 'em does ;” was the intelligent young gentleman's response. “Work uncommon hard upon precious little grub. I never see such a getting up stairs, only you never comes to the top.”

For the first time Christopher perceived that he might really be placed in a somewhat serious position. Half speaking to himself, he murmured :

“The treadmill ! And when I come out what would become of me ?”

“Oh ! lots of things ;” replied the boy, taking the remark to himself. “You looks like a swell ; I suppose you can write ?”

“Oh ! I can write ;” answered Christopher, almost mechanically.

“Very good. I can't ; leastwise not a great deal. I've learnt to do, ‘*I am Starving !*’ and ‘*Necessity Compels !*’ in chalk, on the pavements. It took me a good bit to get up though. And I can draw a mackrel beautiful with blue and white ; but that isn't writing. It isn't the line of business neither I likes much ; only in winter, a cove gets as hard up for grub as the sparrers. Oh ! if you can write, there's lots to do.”

Christopher, thinking that the application of this talent, as his intelligent young friend would recommend it, would not be altogether consistent with his own notions of honesty, did not continue the subject. But he allowed the other to go on, as he awaited the hour at which the court would open. At length the bolts were withdrawn, and he was summoned to the office. His ideas were as completely bewildered, by this time, as if he had really been about to undergo the punishment which the boy had alluded to in such admiring terms ; and he scarcely knew what took place, until he found himself in the presence of the magistrate, amidst a crowd of the lowest, filthiest characters that London could produce.

CHAPTER XLI.

SIR FREDERICK ARDEN OUT ON THE LOOSE.

SIR Frederick Arden did not stay long at Vauxhall after the row. A few of the bystanders who had noticed Christopher's chivalric attack appeared inclined to take his part: and as the young Baronet did not wish to get into any fresh battle he left the gardens accompanied by his friends and went back to the West End, promising to stand a lobster supper at 'a crib he knew'. One of his companions was a very whiskerless young Cornet of the "dear Twelfth," so endeared to Fanny Hamper; and the other was a young gentleman following the medical profession at one of the Borough hospitals, rejoicing in the name of Barnes. Sir Frederick had met him amidst the distinguished frequenters of the Cock and Badger, and pronounced him to be "first rate, and no mistake about it at all." He was chiefly remarkable for playing rude tricks, as a clown might be expected to do, in private life; and he never lost an opportunity, ran a joke too far, nor did the same thing twice, which distinguished him from funny people generally, and made his company greatly sought after by young Arden.

The party, then, left Vauxhall; and proceeded through a densely-populated neighbourhood, running parallel with the Thames, the geography of which was known only to its natives, and the boating men who used its various public-houses, whereat matches were got up amongst watermen, and information stored respecting aquatic affairs generally. It was the region of crazy, tumble-down, waterside manufactories, and chimneys that never knew a holiday. Everywhere huge gasometers and glowing kilns rose over the walls and houses, the choking vapours from which hung ever about the surrounding districts; heavy waggons blocked up the narrow streets, and restless fevered, overworked steam-engines, gasped and panted night and day. To add to the general malaria of the place, noisome sewers, and ditches, and drains from the different works, sluggishly flowed down to the Thames, and the ground was always damp and steaming; for on every high tide the water rose above its level, rushing through the lowest floors of the miserable tenements, and driving the rats almost into the beds of the scared occupants.

At length they emerged into the Westminster Bridge Road, but not until Sir Frederick Arden had made a point of entering every public house he passed, at all of which he was known, and learned much about "scratch" matches, and challenges, and purses, and the Coombes, and Searles, and Noultons, and other amphibious personages of much importance in the liquid world. On arriving at the door of some public baths, they found a large crowd collected on the footway, showing that something was going on of high interest and excitement.

"What's the row?" asked Mr. Barnes of a young gentleman in a

paper cap and turned-up shirt sleeves, who was pushing about in the crowd.

"There's some spar'n going on," said the boy.

"Some who—how much?" inquired Mr. Barnes.

"Sparrin'," repeated the boy with increased emphasis; "for the benefit of somebody as fot and was beat tother day."

"To be sure," said Sir Frederick, "Nick told me about it. He's safe to be here. Let's go in. I'd put on the gloves with any man jack of them for sixpence, and lick him too."

"Were you ever in the P. R.?" asked the young Cornet.

"Me!" replied Sir Frederick, in astonishment. "Why I beat the Brummagem Punch after one hundred and seventy rounds. I laid him up for life, and collected an annuity for his family, winning nearly a thousand wagers by standing on my head on the top of the church in Langham Place."

"Why, how did you get there?" asked Mr. Barnes.

"Oh! I got there fast enough," said Sir Frederick; as if he thought the performance too common-place for explanation, which perhaps might have worried him.

The conversation was cut short by a disagreement between Mr. Barnes and the boy, whose paper cap had been thrown by that gentleman into a shop, which involved the necessity of going in after it, and being kicked out by the proprietor. Mr. Barnes directly shouted out, "Police!" and "There he goes!" and having excited popular curiosity, they took their checks, passed along the passage, and found themselves in the arena.

It was a curious scene enough. The water had been drained off from the baths, and the floor, which was now quite dry, afforded standing room for some five or six hundred people, whilst a stage was erected in the centre, surrounded by ropes, and approachable from the top of the dressing boxes by a light platform. The front of the boxes themselves was guarded by a barrier of planks, and appropriated to those who paid two shillings; whilst the roofs of these little closets formed the reserved seats for that class of visitors whom the mass designated as 'the swells'; and here our party placed themselves. A dense atmosphere of bad tobacco smoke, so thick as to render the other end of the building indistinct, pervaded the whole area; for every other person had a cigar in his mouth, apparently of that choice kind which a class of sporting old-clothes-men carry about with a lighted fusee at the races. Rows of flaring gas-lights illuminated the multitude; and a band of music, the noise of which certainly had the advantage over the harmony, was performing all sorts of extraordinary compositions between the acts of the sparring.

"The Pluckley Crusher, and Hanley," bawled out a man in shirt sleeves, who followed two of the modern gladiators on to the platform, designating each of them by his forefinger, as he called their names out.

"There's Nick!" cried Sir Frederick: "he's the best hand for a pot."

"Very well," said Mr. Barnes; "I'll back the gentleman in the ankle-jacks."

The combatants commenced a series of very droll attitudes, pretending to hit and not doing it, jumping about like harlequins, and bobbing up and down to avoid anticipated blows. At length, after a sharp scrimmage, Hanley fell, whereupon loud applause arose from the friends of the Crusher. The man in the shirt sleeves was very active; and, leaping over the ropes, raised the vanquished boxer, amidst a shower of coppers, lavishly thrown upon the stage by the spectators.

"I'll trouble you for fippence," said Sir Frederick to Mr. Barnes.

"Here's sixpence, and give me a penny," said that gentleman. "Now see me hit the Crusher with the odd copper."

And suiting the action to the word, he pitched the penny piece at the victor with an aim that made him wince as it struck him. But it called his attention to the party, and with a nod of recognition, Mr. Mawley came up to assist his friends in emptying the pewter.

Part of the band here struck up "Jolly Nose," which would have been very amusing, only the other part was playing some popular waltz; and a little boy in an apron kept up a very noisy vocal accompaniment by rushing wildly amongst the mob in the arena, and vociferating loudly, "Give your orders, gents." Sir Frederick ordered the beer, and then, proud to be known as intimate friends of the Pluckley Crusher, they sat in state to see the next performances.

"Davis—and—Alick Reed," bawled the shirt sleeves, as two more champions marched on to the platform. The former of these worthies was a tall negro; and the latter, as one of the aristocracy and tried members of the ring, wore a Jersey, whose web however did not conceal the action of his biceps and pectoral muscles from being well developed, whereupon Mr. Barnes expressed a wish that he had a superior extremity to make a preparation of; and having kicked a man's hat off, with malice prepense, as he passed below, begged his pardon with great politeness, and turned away his wrath by offering him some beer, as he sang a verse of "Hot codlins," and made a dreadful face at him when he was not looking.

As soon as the last-named couple of heroes had concluded their contest, another storm of penny pieces rattled on the platform, and the band commenced indulging in some more concerted pieces of the same nature with those we have already mentioned, to which Mr. Barnes put extempore words. At length, after waiting some time, it was evident that there was a screw loose in the programme of the evening's entertainments. The stamps and clatterings of impatience grew into hisses and yells of displeasure; and although the band began for the fourth time to play an Adelphi overture—which is usually an ingenious composition having neither beginning nor end, and therefore admirably adapted to carry on time—yet the notes of disapprobation increased, in spite of all the orchestral efforts to drown them. From certain names which were vociferated from time to time, it appeared that two pugilists who were advertised to spar had not yet arrived; nor was any satisfactory account given for their non-ap-

bell-pull flew round the light, but was not long enough to catch it : it wanted some three or four inches—probably a special defect in its arrangement on the part of the proprietor.

The person in the next box had frequently looked over the curtain, and round the partition, with no very bland expression of features, at the noise of the trio ; and so Sir Frederick determined to play off some joke upon him. He did not long want an opportunity. In the box beyond this, another very jovial, and somewhat noisy, party of gentlemen and ladies had assembled : and these no sooner saw the bell-pull whirling over our friends' table, than they proceeded to copy the amusement, throwing the rope towards the one Sir Frederick had the charge of, and endeavouring to make the two extremities twist and catch, much to the annoyance of their indignant neighbour, over whose heads the handles were continually flying. At last, after getting up and down from his seat in a nervous and excited manner, he popped up, and glanced fiercely over the curtains of the box.

"Oh, you nice old man," said one of the party as he rose.

"I'll thank you to keep your impertinence to yourself," said the gentleman.

"Halloo!" cried Mr. Barnes : "why it isn't you?"

"No, Sir," continued the irritated guest, "it is *not* me. And what if it was?"

"Why—how d'ye do?" continued Mr. Barnes politely.

"You have got the advantage of me, Sir," said the guest, not knowing what to make of the other's grave face.

"I know I have," said Mr. Barnes ; "and I mean to keep it."

"Go and tell that to your grand-children," said a voice in the distant box.

A laugh followed this sally ; and the irritated one bobbed down again, swearing inaudibly.

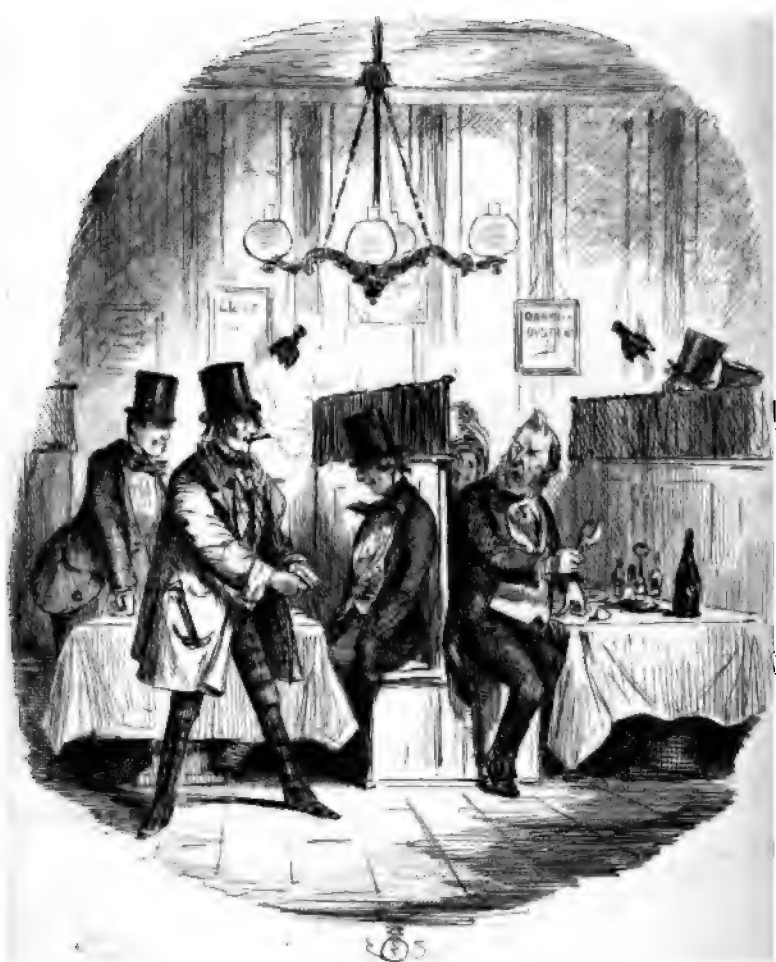
Sir Frederick had now got his cue to act upon. He tied one of the empty bottles to the end of his bell-pull, swinging it gently about as a signal, over his own table.

The other party were not long in taking the hint, and the next moment their bell-pull was ornamented with a similar appendage. Sir Frederick now began to give a little additional impetus to his contrivance. The other did the same, and after two or three ineffectual swings, the two bottles met violently over the table of the devoted visitor, and with a terrific smash, broke into atoms, covering him with a shower of bits of glass and what beer remained in them.

In an instant the little man in the next box rushed out into the room, furious with rage, and Sir Frederick, who meditated being attacked, jumped up too, and put himself on his guard, not caring to receive any more blows that night, for the traces of the last were still unpleasantly palpable round his eye.

"Here, waiter! police! murder! Come here some of you, you miscreants!" cried the injured party.

"Oh! for shame!" exclaimed Sir Frederick, as he looked into the box. "Not supping alone, eh? Go home, old man, go home."





"Police!" continued the stranger. "Scoundrels!" he went on, as he flourished a stick. "I've brought my cousin here to sup respectably and we are to be insulted by a set of blackguards like you—yes, and, you, Sir—and you—and all your set!"

"Pooh! stuff! cousin!" said Sir Frederick. "Why you're old enough to be her ancestor. Do you know what an ancestor is? You don't look as if you did."

By this time the attendants had arrived from the shop.

"Take this old gentleman away," said Sir Frederick; "shut him up in the cellar, and keep him for a few days upon cucumber peelings. He wants cooling."

"You and cucumbers be—"

"Oh! don't swear," interrupted Mr. Barnes. "Now I know what you're going to say, and it isn't proper before ladies."

"What's your name, Sir—your name?" said the infuriated man, bristling up to the young Baronet.

"My name's Sir Frederick Arden," he replied. "Stop! I don't care a damn what yours is."

In an instant the other's expression changed. He looked at his tormentor for a second or two, and then asked him to step into an adjoining box for a moment, with an assumed politeness and apologetic manner that astonished the spectators, as the Baronet followed him.

"This is a singular occurrence, young Sir F.," he said, when they were alone. "You must know me; my name's Gudge—Mr. Gudge, your honoured lady-mother's solicitor."

"Oh," simply replied young Arden.

"Yes, Sir F.," he continued. "Bless me! I haven't seen you for years. I was going to call upon you to-morrow, upon particular business. He! he! I say, Sir F., not a word about this—eh? Mrs. G. is still in Bullong; and I like to see a little life, you know, eh? He! he! you understand."

"Oh! I'm fly, old fireworks," replied Sir Frederick; "downy as a gosling; up to every thing, from badger-baiting to balloons. You're all right."

"He! he! Sir F.! Ha! ho!" returned Mr. Gudge, with a corpse-like merriment. "Then I will call on you to-morrow. At the Elms, eh?"

"The Elms! no, thank'ee," said young Arden. "I couldn't stand that dreary place. It does very well for my mother in the season; but I must go ahead. I'm in chambers. There—that's the ticket."

And as he spoke he gave Gudge his card.

"Come to-morrow morning," he continued, "and I'll give you some breakfast; only don't bother me now, I'm busy. Good night."

The lawyer made a cringing bow to the Baronet, and Sir Frederick returned to his friends, who had been left to make all sorts of surmises as to the sudden reconciliation. Then settling their score, they started off again into the open streets.

CHAPTER XLII.

GUDGE AND YOUNG ARDEN.—CHRISTOPHER MEETS NEW FRIENDS.

MR. GUDGE kept his appointment, and was at Sir Frederick Arden's chambers before the time agreed upon.

It was yet early morning. Shops were scarcely open, and unshorn men in shirt sleeves, were sweeping dust from the doorways; and nearly every one he met looked as if he had got up before his time. But Mr. Gudge always appeared the same. His features had been case-hardened by long indifference to everything except his own interests, and nobody could ever have told from his countenance what plans he was revolving in his mind.

The housekeeper showed him into Sir Frederick's chambers, and here the first thing he perceived was the form of Mr. Barnes, who was asleep upon the sofa, wrapped up in young Arden's counterpane, with an extinguished cigar in his mouth. The Baronet himself was in bed, in a little room adjoining; but he had evidently got there in a vague manner. His boots and trowsers, all in one, were dangling over a chair, forming a species of spectral double of himself, with the toes turning round in unnatural directions, like the legs of Guy Fawkes. One of his stockings had been flung up into the air, and lodged upon a plaster Joan of Arc that stood on a bracket, clasping a cigar to her breast instead of a sword; and his coat, hung upon the hook of the window-curtains, looked as if it was trying to hide itself out of the way in their folds. The candle on his dressing-table had never been lighted, proving that he had no need of it when he undressed; but it kept solitary guard over a confused display of soda-water bottles, a watch, crumpled playbills, dirty kid-gloves, return checks of theatres, a couple of knockers, and one or two bows of ribbon that had certainly formed no portion of his attire.

If the laundress had not told Mr. Gudge that it was breakfast awaiting him, he might readily have been pardoned for conceiving that it was dinner: for there were no signs of cups and saucers; but plenty of plates, knives, forks, and tumblers; bottles of beer, more soda-water, sardines, and potted-pies. Round about the room were pictures of fighting-men, and stage-coaches,—dashing as stage-coaches never were, and going as stage-coaches never did; and about, here and there, were gun-bags, pistol-cases, whips, boxing-gloves, and single-sticks, in universal confusion.

"Who's there? What's o'clock?" asked young Arden, aroused by Gudge's entrance.

"It's me," replied the attorney; "and it's half-past eight."

"Ah!" returned the Baronet, with a yawn of weariness, "then I've only been in bed three hours. Halloo! Joe!"

This was addressed to Mr. Barnes, in the next room; but not responded to beyond the words, "Oh! bother!" having delivered himself of which, he directly went to sleep again, turning up in the counterpane like a chrysalis.

"I'll just trouble you—if I havn't got rather a head-ache," said Sir Frederick. "Give me that soda-water."

"Where's there a tumbler?" enquired Gudge.

"Oh! never mind: I'll drink it out of the bottle. That's the way to do it."

And this being accomplished, Sir Frederick appeared considerably better.

"How did you come with such a black eye?" asked the lawyer, as he saw the state of Sir Frederick's face.

"Oh, nothing: a row last night at Vauxhall. I went to a fellow to get it painted, but he had his shop full, so I came away."

And he pointed to a small printed card on the table, which informed, "Ladies and Gentlemen accidentally having a contused optic, that it could be effectually concealed by J. Smith, Little-Windmill Street, Haymarket."

"The fellow got as much as he gave though," said Sir Frederick. "I could have licked him into next year, but I didn't want to smash him: so I gave him in charge for the assault. I shall not appear though."

"Have you any idea who it was?" asked Gudge.

"Yes, a queer name—Christopher Tittlebat, no—Tadpole."

"You don't mean that!" cried Gudge, eagerly, seizing Sir Frederick by the arm.

"What's the matter?—Yes, I do. Do you know him?"

"Know him?—rather too well. I picked him up abroad, and brought him over as a kind of servant; since which time he has been running about to find some situation, and now I see, has got it. He! he! How remarkably curious!"

"What is?"

"Why, that you should meet. I was coming to have spoken to you on that very subject; and warn you, knowing he was in town, if you came across him to avoid him, as he was a very dangerous character."

"Well, but was there any chance of it? And how the devil could he annoy me, if I did?"

"Oh! there's no telling—no telling," said Gudge. "However, I warn you; be on your guard, that's all. And so you gave him in charge at the Gardens? Ah—well; I'll go over to Lambeth at once."

"But you'll have some breakfast?"

"Thank'ee, thank'ee, no. I'm in a hurry. I'll see you again. Good bye."

And in much excitement, Mr. Gudge started off to the police-court.

He got there just as Christopher had been sentenced to pay some fine for being drunk and disorderly, and upsetting the police. This he had done, and was leaving the bar, when he encountered Mr. Gudge, looking as like a contented hyena as a human being could do, grinning and bristling, and shewing his teeth in a manner quite frightful.

"So," he said, "so, Sir, this is the position you have at last placed yourself in. Go on, go on, it's all right; take plenty of rope—lots—miles if you want it, and hang yourself at last. A pretty situation this is you have got me into!"

"You!" said Christopher, in some astonishment. "What have I done to you? This is my own affair."

"Yes, and it shall keep so," replied Gudge. "I cast you forth, Sir. I have no more to do with you. You have had your trial. I repeat my determination before witnesses, and I will abide by the consequences. I cast you forth upon the world to gain your own livelihood."

"You told a different story on the Great St. Bernard," said Christopher, in a low tone of voice. "We shall be equal yet. I do not wish to have anything more to do with you—at present."

And he put such meaning into the two last words that Gudge got quite uneasy, and shuffled away, repeating his public denunciation, whilst Christopher found fresh acquaintances at the door of the office.

These were no less than Skittler and Sprouts, who, having seen all the affair last night, had been talking the matter over and laying their heads together, until they recollected the name, and the different mysterious circumstances in which the boy had been formerly involved.

"Come along," said Tom as Christopher left the place. "Come along, Sir. My name's Sprouts, and this is Skittler. We are all friends. Come and get some breakfast, and then we'll have a talk."

"And never mind the lawyer," said Skittler. "We knows him of old. Hooray!"

They hurried along, scarcely allowing Christopher to speak, but evidently quite proud of having him with them, looking upon him as the lion of the evening before. And in a very little time, by reason of several short cuts, which, from their intricate appearance, no casual person would ever have trusted himself into with hopes of emerging again, they arrived at Tom's library in the court.

The little back parlour was very neat; and there had evidently been a conspiracy to bring Christopher there; for the breakfast was all laid out—so different to Sir Frederick's. No bottles, nor potted pies—good things as they were in their way: but a large coffee-pot, and some knobby little loaves, and such gay cups and saucers, that clinked and jingled quite musically. And there were periwinkles too, still warm; and some bloaters' tails peeped from between two plates, and in a clean blacking-bottle in the middle of the table were some double carnations that scented the whole room, overcoming even the herrings. But before all these there was Bessy Payne, and Patsy; and then

there was no difficulty in conceiving how everything had been arranged so well.

"There, Bessy!" said Tom, as they entered the little room. "We've got him. I thought we should. Patsy, this is the gentleman that fought for you—"

"And fot precious well too," interpolated Skittler.

"So well, as Skittler says, last night, at Vauxhall."

As Christopher held out his hand, the girl seized it eagerly, and blushed as she raised her full dark eyes to meet his own. And then she drew it away, and looked at Bessy, who laughed until Patsy did too, but very gently, from which those versed in the emotions of young ladies generally might have drawn a conclusion that Christopher had formed the subject of conversation before his arrival.

"Now sit down, sit down," said Sprouts, getting quite nervous and excited with his company. Sir—Mr. Tadpole—"

"Oh! call me Christopher at once."

"Oh no! Mr. Christopher—will you go there, by Patsy. Bessy, you know how to make coffee so well. Skittler, I don't think you do much in that line."

"Not much, thankee," replied Skittler. "I should prefer a pipe, if it's all the same, and I'll sit outside the window."

"So you shall," said Bessy, smiling; "only mind the water-butt and Tom's plants. Why, Tom, how bad the beans look; and mine have got all round the window."

"Oh, they won't grow here," said Tom. "When I found water did them no good, I tried beer, but that was worse; I don't understand flowers. However, perhaps they will be better soon."

And here he looked very suspiciously at Bessy, who turned it off by rapidly pouring out the coffee for everybody, as Skittler took his place outside the window and lighted his pipe.

Christopher was not guilty of much delay in falling upon the cheer that the good young folks had provided; for, although the authorities of police offices provide lodging of unexceptionable security for those whom their hospitable doors are thrown open to receive, their board may in most cases be taken rather in a literal sense than a figurative one. Indeed, the whole party, who had evidently postponed the hour of their breakfast beyond the usual time; were soon fully occupied in eating and drinking; so fully indeed, that the chief conversation emanated from Skittler, who talked through the open window in the intervals of smoking.

"I was a thinking," he observed to Christopher during one of the pauses, "I was a thinking what we could do for you, now you've lost Mr. Gudge's patronage, which you won't see none the worse for. You wouldn't like to be a hair-dresser, should you?"

"Not much, I think," said Christopher, smiling.

"Because you looks cut out for it—that's all; and I know a place where you'd be worth any money."

Skittler meant this as a compliment, although it was not altogether taken as such.

"Ah! that's a sweller go altogether. You ought to be a little older by good rights; howsumever, spectacles may do something. You must get somebody to go with you who looks seedy, like a cheap clerk; and carries a book and an ink-bottle. When I first knew Sprouts he would have been the very thing—worth any money."

"Now Skittler; don't be impudent," said Tom.

"I won't; very good. You goes into old gentleman's house, we'll suppose, to begin; and you says on entering, 'I beg your parding, sir; I'm Captain Knightsbridge.' The old gent bows because he can't do nothink else, not knowing you. 'The recreations of the people is a great thing,' says you. The old gent bows again. 'But is cramped by turnpikes,' you continues. The old gent thinks they is; and then you goes off—'I have spent my life,' you says, 'in trying to get the pikes repealed; and now wish for names to give it weight. Perhaps you will add your influential one, sir. We have already Sir Hyde Park, Sir Stamford Hill, Viscount Kennington, Highbury Barnes Esq., Lady Day, the Lady Chapel, and other leading members of the aristocracy.' The old gent says he has no objection, and down goes his name. Then you says, 'you must be aware, sir, this business is not conducted without a trifling expense, and I may perhaps solicit your mite towards it.' The old gent, having signed his name, doesn't know what mess he's got into; and you half frightens, half talks him out of five shillings. And then, on you goes agen, next door; and for that street your fortune's made."

Enticing as Skittler thought these schemes for money-raising, Christopher did not at once adopt any of them. But he listened with great attention, and when they had talked a little more, he started away to look after, and collect his things, finding that he could have a room, for a small sum, at the top of Sprouts's residence. Skittler finished his pipe and departed upon one or more of his wonderful avocations; and Tom went back to his library to let out the ghost stories, and sell the theatrical portraits and tinsel dots until evening came again.

When it did they all re-assembled. Bessy and Christopher, and also Mr. and Mrs. Chirpey, in full dress; for there was going to be a grand concert at the Mutual Improvement Society that had its periodicals of Sprouts; and as the members were to sing themselves in addition to the professionals, and Tom sold the tickets and hung the bills in his window, he felt bound to go. So after tea, off they went, and got there just as it began, in Professor Fandango's Assembly Rooms, where the society met on the off-nights of the balls. It was commenced by a young man dressed in black, without a shirt-collar, and having much the appearance, as Mr. Chirpey remarked, of an undertaker's apprentice; which cheerful line of life one would hardly have supposed that the jolly man knew anything about. It commenced by this young man striding into the concert-room, seizing a music-stool, and, just as all

expected to see him commence some operation in the upholstery line, sitting down to the piano, and commencing a song.

Such a song too. It was called, "The Dream of the Reveller," and described how, when some foreign nobleman gave a party, he was horrified at discovering amongst his guests a skeleton, who, to make him more lively and festive in his appearance, was represented as adorned with "mildewed and rotten hair." It was quite awful, and, as Bessy said, made her creep all over. The skeleton, however, appeared to have behaved himself rather convivially than otherwise, for he drank a large goblet of wine, although anatomists would have wondered where the skeleton could have disposed of it; for if he had swallowed it, it must have come splashing through his ribs and pelvis on to the floor. But, as Tom sensibly observed, very probably it all got into his head, which large goblets of wine were apt to do.

Then a young lady sang "Come dwell with me," but the invitation was given in such a low nervous tone as to be what the newspapers call quite inaudible from the gallery. And Sprouts said he shouldn't have seemed to care much about accepting it; and Bessy looked at the young lady, and said wickedly she was sure he would; upon which, from a sudden start, Sprouts is supposed to have pinched her; for she cried, very softly though, "Oh! now pray don't, Tom!" and Mr. Chirpey said, very quietly also, "Turn him out!" And then the gaunt young man, who was called in the programme, Mr. Tombs, obliged the company again.

His next song—for he was the great gun of the amateurs, and was never got rid of by hearing only once—was something about a maniac. And certainly he gave a very good idea of a maniacal state of mind in his piano-forte accompaniment, for he banged the notes high and low, and broke the strings, and worked the pedals at such an excited and ferocious rate, that one could hear no words except the burden—

"No, by heaven!—no, by heaven!! I am not mad!!!"

At the last verse though, he changed his opinion, and declared that somebody had driven him mad. The audience appeared to believe neither of his assertions; and to think that, insane as he must have been to have attempted such a song, the earliest symptom of returning reason was evinced by his concluding it.

They applauded very much, though; and so did Mr. Chirpey, with his stick; after which he said he would recommend Mr. Tombs to publish his songs in one volume, if he had any more like them: feeling assured that they would be very popular amongst grave-diggers, and that no family—he meant family-vault, Tom whispered to Bessy—should be without a copy.

Next came two more lady pupils of Herr Fireverkst, who directed the concert; and Bessy felt great interest in them, because she whispered to Mrs. Chirpey that she had made one of their dresses. The duet put down for them in the bills, was "I know a bank,"

upon which Tom said to Bessy, so did he, and he had ~~some~~ money in it too,—put in every Monday evening, from seven till nine, in sums not exceeding half-a-crown. And this was thought so excellent a joke that it was passed round to the party. Then another young gentleman sang, "The White Squall," which Mr. Chirpey thought he imitated very well; and when he came to the end, and shouted something about the bark being gulped by an ocean wave, he worked upon the feelings of the audience so, that they encored him, upon which he gave them "The Return of the Admiral." In this there was a line about its being so dark that they could see nothing but a whistle and a plunge, which Mr. Chirpey could not make out at all, and said that they might as well talk about hearing the moonlight: and Bessy agreed with him, until Tom told her it was what was called 'poetic license,' upon which she was quite satisfied.

The amateur portion of the concert being over, the talented professionals now began, Herr Fireverkst sitting down to perform the overture to "Semiramide," with variations; and as this will take some time, from the "*tum; tum; tum; tum; tumtity tum!*" of the commencement, to the end, we will fill up the period by speculations on the performer.

Herr Fireverkst was a professor of the pianoforte. Similar professors are not persons whose talents have been crowned by that title by any learned assembly: they give themselves their own degree, and print 'Professor' on their cards, for the sufficient reason that they profess to play on an instrument. On the same principle, Mrs. Twigs, the mangling woman, who lived next door to Tom, in the court, was a professor, because she professed to use Baker's Patent Mangle, although all the time she well knew that she didn't.

Herr Fireverkst had great powers of execution. Everybody who lived in the same street knew it, for he had a great love of playing with open windows, so that on fine evenings the very cab-horses were startled with his bursts of brilliancy; and, at all times, strange rumblings, like thunder shut up in a drum, pervaded the thoroughfare. He had been known to play the overture to "Figaro" right through in half-a-minute, in that style of playing known as Macadamized Music; and when he appeared at a concert he never looked at the audience, but sat down, played whatever he liked, and then walked out, with a look that plainly said, "There, if you don't like *that*, you are a set of tasteless wretches!—and if you do, I won't play it again!" Herr Fireverkst made a point of never playing in private when he thought any one wanted to hear him; but he appeared to delight in voluntarily beginning interminable pieces of his own composition, where he knew they could not be appreciated, and would only prove an annoyance.

He also wore mighty mustachios: in common with most of his brethren. With all deference to their taste, it certainly seems strange when a man with his head dressed in the style of a brigand, an ancient

gladiator, or an officer of the old Imperial Guard, enters a concert-room and coolly sits down to play soft accompaniments to other people's songs. It is true he may put a little character into the affair by scowling ferociously at every body, but as nobody notices him much during the progress of the ballad, even this must become tedious at last. And it is no doubt to remedy this that several professors have invented remarkable styles of dressing their heads, so peculiarly their own that they must be the chief objects of observation, wherever they may be, and however long they may remain. Some wear their hair long with the ends turned outwardly away from the neck: some roll them under: and some leave the disposition of the ends to fate or circumstances. Some wear mustachios and spectacles: some mustachios and no whiskers: some shave their faces, leaving only a tuft, not on the chin, but under it: some crop their hair quite close and never shave at all; whilst the rest form mustachios, hair, and spectacles into such a variety of combinations as to defy enumeration. Indeed when we hear, now at the present day, that the grotesque griffinheads which adorn the gothic work of the New Hall, Lincoln's Inn, are said to be modelled closely from celebrated professors of the piano-forte we believe it to be true.

All this, however, went capitally with the members of the Mutual Improvement Society. The committee had the highest opinion of Herr Fireverkst and were proud to take a glass of Marsala and a mixed biscuit with him behind the screen which formed the green-room at the concerts, but the private apartment in which Professor Fandango's pupils changed their boots for pumps, when the passage was full, on Assembly nights. And when he concluded, the applause was loud and continued, Mr. Chirpey confessing that he couldn't do that—no—not if any body gave him a thousand pounds. Upon this Sprouts told him that whilst any body could secure the Herr's services for five, the offer was not very likely to be made: which Betsy said was so like Tom! she never knew such a fellow!

The concert proceeded: but all this time Christopher had remained silent, apparently quite abstracted from what was going on about him, as he kept his eyes fixed on the programme of the Institution. At last, between the parts, he said to Sprouts:

"I have been looking at the different lectures here; do you pay the people who give them."

"Sometimes," said Tom; "they get two or three guineas, and more. Sometimes the members lecture themselves, and they get nothing—not even an audience always. The lectures where there's something to look at—experiments or diagrams—take best: the people don't care to hear a man read anything from a book. They can do that at home."

"I see," continued Christopher. "Now, look here. I have been thinking if I could get up something of the kind, and go about with it—I mean in the country—I might pay a good bit of my expenses if I did not exactly make a fortune by it. And so I might get right through England, and make all sorts of inquiries."

"I think it's a very good plan," said Tom; "suppose we ask Skittler. He's gone about, in his time, a great deal."

"I don't think what I mean is exactly in his line," said Christopher, with a smile.

"Oh; but he knows the best places so well, and how to bill them," said Tom, whose faith in his friend was not to be thus lightly shaken. "We shall see him to-night. And there's something else I want to talk to you about very particularly."

The concert commenced again, cutting short the conversation; and when it finished—which it did, with a laughing *trio*, so comical that all the audience began to laugh too, and it was at one time thought that Mr. Chirpey would never have recovered it—when it was over, the jolly man insisted upon them all going back to his house to supper.

"I've got some of the old beer," he said to Sprouts. "That especial tap you know, that's brewed a purpose for me. I hope there's some left though. Letty, my dear, is there? For really, Mrs. Chirpey, just now, does drink such a quantity that the tub runs dry in no time."

And this direct insinuation so astonished Mrs. Chirpey, that all she could say was,

"Oh! my goodness! Well, I never did! But you know him."

"Yes; we know him," said Tom; "and glad to do it. Now, Bessy, see how well I have learned to put on a shawl. There—quite like a fashion-book! Does the collar go under or over, though? That's what I can never make out."

"Under, Tom—under: always under," replied Bessy.

And then the pretty girl twitched the shawl first on one side, and then on the other, until it was all right and proper; when, as she stepped along the seats up to the door, she looked so trim and neat, with her back-hair so nicely arranged—low down, quite low, until it rested on her white neck—that Tom could not contain his admiration, but turned round and whispered to Christopher, quite in confidence:

"Isn't she a little stunner?"

They went merrily on to Mr. Chirpey's; and when they got there, they found Skittler had just arrived with Patsy from Vauxhall, for he made a point of seeing her home every night. And whilst the girls were taking off their things, and admiring Mrs. Chirpey's last production, who was asleep in its cot, Tom mentioned Christopher's intentions to Skittler.

"Oh—going a travelling, is you?" asked that gifted person. "Well, if you want a yellow caravan cheap, I'm the man to get one just now."

"I don't exactly want a caravan," said Christopher, "nor indeed anything immediately. But in a few weeks' time, I think about going off."

"Here's luck then," returned Skittler, as he blew the froth away from a foaming jug of Mr. Chirpey's especial just presented to him. "But remember, if you don't want a caravan now, you may; and I

know where there's one to be got cheap. You recollect Joe Topham, governor, that drove your advertizing vans?"

"Quite well," replied Mr. Chirpey.

"Very good. He's going into the circus line ; because he's been terrible put out with his caravan. I see him to-night in the stables, and he's uncommon cranky to be sure."

"What about?"

"Why, just this. He went out with No. 4 caravan to do a bit of chance work in the streets. He'd been a trying to make his missus's baby into Tom Thumb all day long, by putting it in top boots and a cocked hat ; but it wouldn't do at no price, because it can't walk yet naturally, and isn't weaned. And so you see that riled him."

"I wonder he expected it," said Mr. Chirpey. "Let's see—two, four, five—why the child's not six months old now. It was born just when he left me to go to Greenwich Fair ; and he came afterwards back with a sad story, and said the boa-constrictor had been obliged to be turned out, because they wanted the blankets."

"Ah, that wasn't all," said Skittler. "Bill Haines lent us one of the cars of his roundabout to make a cradle with ; only he wanted it back the next morning for the look of the thing, and the babby couldn't be well moved because there was nowhere else to put him, so we covered him over, and he went round and round all day."

"Why it was enough to addle his brains," said Sprouts. "Take my word he'll grow up a fool."

"I wish he'd grow up a good one," replied Skittler, whose thoughts reverted to Mr. Merriman. "There's not so many now-a-days."

"One of my men was telling me about something wonderful to-day," said Mr. Chirpey. "He says, over here, in Lambeth, there's a child that was born in a hurry in a third class carriage on the Great Western, and has got an engine marked on its neck, that goes all round it in the course of the day. And they say there's letters in its eyes, and you can read 'Slough' round one pupil and 'Luggage' round the other."

Skittler shook his head with an expression of disbelief.

"I doubt it," he observed. "I don't believe in these things. They say Mrs. Haines went to see a pantomime, and looked at the clown so, that when her first baby was born, its first words was 'here we are,' and it made a comical face. But it didn't grow up noways different to others for all that."

Christopher saw that Skittler was not likely to assist him much. The return of the girls here stopped the conversation ; but he thought more than ever on the subject ; and determined to carry it out, and begin the very next day, as soon as Sprouts had confided to him the particular business alluded to.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MR. AND MRS. GUDGE KEEP DISTINGUISHED COMPANY—AN
AWKWARD EXPOSÉ.

ONCE having been abroad—which was the only step she thought necessary to perfect her for mixing in any society—Mrs. Gudge determined to shew the world that she was one of the superior classes. And so, the season no sooner came round again, than the house in Eaton Place was newly decorated from top to bottom, and so many wonderful articles of *virtu* distributed about the rooms, that all Wardour Street could scarcely have held them. All the works of art which it is incumbent upon every traveller to purchase were displayed about the rooms. There were alabaster models of the Leaning Tower at Pisa, and the boar at Florence, and the Ariadne at Frankfort; every kind of paper knife, and cup and salad-fork ever made on, or rather for, the Rigi; more Canaletti's than that ingenious and industrious artist could have produced, with night and day work, in a century; and, to superficial observers, all alike.

No man ever shewed such ingenuity in finding so many points of view in the same place as Canaletti. Had he been an English painter, he would have made Leicester Square his Piazza St. Marco, and treated it as follows:—1. Leicester Square; 2. Leicester Square from Miss Linwood's; 3. Leicester Square from Bertholini's; 4. Leicester Square from the Western Literary Institution; 5. Leicester Square from the place where the houses are pulled down. 6. View near the Sablonière, Leicester Square; 7. Interior of Leicester Square; 8. Entrance to the Grand Alley of Cranbourne, Leicester Square; 9. The Pavement, Leicester Square; 10. Inside the railings, Leicester Square, morning; 11. Outside the same, noon; 12. The cabstand, Leicester Square. All these variations of the same place, with a Venetian *locale*, adorned the Gudges' mansion; and all of them had a square tower with a peaky top for the most prominent object.

The appointments about the house were of the costliest description, and everything had been bought under the directive taste of Lady Parlaware, whom Mrs. Hamper had done the Gudges the honour to introduce to them. Lady Parlaware found Mrs. Gudge's carriage so very convenient for the park, and Mrs. Gudge's house so admirably adapted for parties, that she did not mind patronizing her. She was one of those old lady-vampires we find attached to all *parvenu* establishments, who fan their victims into dreams of position with their introductions and directions, whilst they drain them of their vital principal, or gold. And in the Park, Lady Parlaware always took the off-seat of the carriage to meet every body, and bow if they were worth it; and at the parties, the invitations were chiefly confined to her own friends.

Some of the old Gudge circle were asked—the Flacks especially, because they could talk of great people; and Miss Flack, who was advancing towards the wrong side of thirty, and did not rival any of the girls who came, but yet was thought agreeable by the single gentlemen on the wrong side of fifty. Miss Preston, the governess, who was one of the party when the late Sir Frederick Arden had dined at Coke Villa, had been married three or four years, and married very well, to the terrible disgust of the family; inasmuch as her husband had first been introduced on the chance of fancying Miss Flack, but preferred the soft eyes and gentle manners of the governess to all the gaudy jewellery and affected bearing of the other lady.

The Snash's too were kept up; but only for evenings, never being asked to dinner; because they always came in a Brompton fly, which did not look well drawing up to the door at daylight. Mr. Snash, however, had upon a change of ministry got something better in the stamps and taxes than ever he had had before; so he ceased to abuse them, and was now regarded by the Gudges as a link between their circle and the Cabinet. The Baron, too, had caught the wife, who wanted his title in exchange for her property—it was said that she had been the daughter of a sea-side hotel-keeper—and he was a most eligible guest. For the announcement of their names was always a hit; the mustachios looked imposing; and he always sat by Mrs. Gudge, and talked French for her when foreign gentlemen were at table. He had an effective friend also, a Silesian nobleman, the Count Toko, whom, it was said, political intrigue had banished from his country, but who in the event of a revolution, would direct the State; and when the Baron was engaged on important affairs, not being jealous, the Count escorted the Baroness, which made it very comfortable for all parties. And last, although not least, Mrs. Hamper and Fanny were always disengaged when wanted; and if by chance they did not receive an invitation to any party, they came without it, Mrs. Hamper observing that she had known her old friends, the Gudges, too long to stand upon any conventional ceremonies with them.

"G.," said Mrs. Gudge one morning at breakfast, as she put down the Morning Post, which she took in because Lady Parlawar had told her to; "G., here was all the world yesterday at Mrs. Howard Aubrey's fancy fair. I must have one too."

"Pooh!" replied Gudge. "What for?"

"Ah! there it is," said Mrs. Gudge. "I don't know; but it ought to be some popular charity. I must ask Lady Parlawar."

"Is there anything to be got out of it?" inquired Mr. Gudge.

"Got out of it—of course. It is talked of you know, and goes in the papers."

"Ay; but will it pay? Because I shan't have the house pulled about if it won't. We can keep all we make I suppose?"

"Lord, G.! what do you mean?"

"Mean? What I say. What else should I? And don't call me 'G.'; you've been told of that before."

"You did not object once," said Mrs. Gudge, tenderly. "But once isn't now."

"No, thank the stars," replied her husband, "it ain't."

And he put his hands in his pockets, jingled his money, whistled, and stretched out his legs to look at his slippers.

There was a slight pause, and then Mrs. Gudge recommenced:

"What did you really mean, G.—that is Mr. Gudge—by what we could make of the fancy fair?"

"Why, who's to know where the money goes to? And if people are fools enough to give five pounds for a pin-cushion knocked off the sticks at the races for a halfpenny, who's to care?"

"No, G.—"

"Gudge."

"Well, no, Gudge; I'd do it willingly, but it might be found out, and then it wouldn't be honest. Never mind; it will pay in another way. Lady Parlawar and Mrs. Hamper are coming here at eleven to take me to buy some American thingembobs at Watercr's to grow in the balcony, and then I'll talk to them about it."

"There! just as you please," said Mr. Gudge. "I suppose all this tomfoolery is requisite."

He liked it though. As long as he was without the circle of the mushroom sphere of the world of fashion, he sneered at everything he did not enter into. But the *entrée* once gained, he was directly bitten by the love of display and the wish to outshine those who moved about him. And neither Gudge nor his wife ever felt humiliated. In the absence of any educated delicacy of feeling, they were never sensible of the hard hits from time to time aimed at them. Nor did they see the mistakes they at times committed; the very acts being the proofs of their ignorance.

Lady Parlawar's opinion was asked, and the result was that a fair for Mrs. Hamper's Dorcas Charity down in the country would be a famous thing to enlist the sympathies of the multitude. The Dorcas Charity was not in itself an important eleemosynary institution; but as this was not known, it was of little consequence. It was principally confined to distributing coal and blanket tickets, which the neighbouring gentry subscribed for, to the cottagers about her country abode in the winter. But on the present occasion it sounded well, and was decided upon.

And then came the collection of articles. Mrs. Gudge's fancy-work was confined to patch-work kettle-holders, which, although useful things in their way, are not altogether striking at a fancy-fair. But Miss Flack could do Poonah painting, and the infant Snashes, respectively, could triumph over every difficulty in the way of Berlin wool; and Fanny Hamper set all the girls at Mrs. Sadler's to work upon those extraordinary freaks of art which only schools can furnish—pin-cushions, rice-paper butterflies, and worsted dahlia's, perforated card inutilities of all descriptions, drawings of large heads and little Bridges of Sighs, with d'Oyleys, rugs, aprons, handkerchiefs, and pen-wipers of

every known and unknown make. They also had a great many things lent them to look grand behind the stalls, which were not to be sold. Indian cabinets, mosaic tables, and Albanian shawls, ticketed at marvellous prices that nobody could give, even at a fancy-fair. And by way of novelty, a refreshment stand was added, where ices were to be charged for at the rate of no change a piece whatever was tendered; and wafer cakes in proportion. The Baron had also an excellent scheme in his head to raise more money, which we shall speak of anon. And Mr. Ellis fitted up the conservatory on the top of the stairs with Cosmorama views, painted by himself, of Mont Blanc and Switzerland, introducing his aunt's perilous ascent, at her own request. Lady Parlamar was to ask every body she knew, right and left, and to tell them to do the same; and even the Flacks and Snashes were told to bring all their friends, because, as Mrs. Gudge observed, though all their acquaintances were not so genteel as could be wished, yet their money was the same as anybody else's, and nobody would look at them in the crowd.

Mrs. Hamper provided the young ladies; and of course Fanny had the best place—the stall with its back to the light in the front drawing-room; and by her influence, the pretty blonde Miss Maurice, and the flashing-eyed Kate Clifford, and the delicate *belle de nuit*, Louisa Herbert, accompanied her from Mrs. Sadler's the day before—properly and in the Gudge landau, in preference to the offer of Sir Frederick Arden to spin them all over in his dog-cart in no time, if they would get up at the end of the lane where Mrs. Sadler could not see him. Miss Flack was to keep the refreshment stall, at which she felt inclined to be cross, until Lady Parlamar shewed her a coloured lithograph called *La belle Limonadière*, and fancied she saw a resemblance which so flattered her that she imagined herself the *Dame du Comptoir* at the *Café des Mille Colonnes* immediately. And after advertisements had appeared in the leading papers for several mornings running, that the fancy-fair in aid of the funds of the Dorcas Charity would be held, by permission, in the mansion of Joshua Gudge, Esq., there was quite an excitement created about it; and but for Lady Parlamar and Mrs. Hamper, Mrs. Gudge would have been more flurried than she was at her first dinner-party.

The day came; and after two o'clock the carriages formed long lines all along the place. The Snashes came in the Brompton fly, and, like all horrid people, would come up to the door instead of getting down modestly at the corner, as they ought to have done, and walking on. And, of course, they kept the carriage of the Countess of Donnybrook, who was to be the great visitor of the day, with the Ladies Knock-blarny—of course they kept it from drawing up whilst they settled with the fly-man, as they intended to walk home, and squabbled about giving him something for himself.

The people walked about the rooms for all the world as if they had been at the Pantheon; and the men flirted with the girls; and young Arden would keep behind Fanny Hamper's stall; and Mrs. Gudge

made bows, which were not returned once in a dozen times, as none of the visitors but those who had dined at her house knew her; and some of those did not now. But there was a capital list of names for the "fashionable intelligence," and so at present she was satisfied.

After a time, when the rooms were quite filled, the Baron was to sing, for which purpose a space was cleared, and he took his place on an ottoman in the middle of the room with his guitar, and began. It was a very romantic ballad, describing the happy life of a Tyrolese peasant, and was full of those jumps from the natural voice to the falsetto, which has been usually put to music in the English word "va-ri-e-ty!" Young Arden—whose first communication to Fanny Hamper when he entered had been that he was in a state of pale ale—behaved with unwonted impropriety during the performance; declaring aloud that he knew a man at the Cider Cellars he would back against him for anything, from a pint to a pony, and called for various imitations of singing birds, and tunes upon walking-sticks, the power of producing which he associated with Tyrolese melody generally. And when between each verse one of the young ladies went round with a worked reticule to collect money, in a pretty imitation of street performers, the low-minded young man shouted out, "Three pence more and up goes the donkey!" which coarse speech, although it produced a laugh from the thoughtless visitors, made those of well-regulated minds grieve deeply. But the young Baronet was buying everything right and left, and had a title; so the bad behaviour was overlooked, as was the absurd manner in which he pulled the string of a dancing-doll in measure to the time. Indeed the sharpest rebuke of all he met with was from Fanny Hamper, who said, "Pray keep quiet, do, you wild thing!" but enjoyed it all the time amazingly. So that young Arden was quite unchecked, and intended to have his fling of fun whilst he was there.

"Halloo!" cried Sir Frederick, as he saw somebody advancing that he knew. "Here's Barnes! Now we shall do!"

Mr. Barnes, who was very extensively made up for the occasion in a blue stock and yellow kid gloves, which he imagined to be the height of fashionable dress, advanced towards Sir Frederick, with a series of winks, and nods, and singular distortions of his mouth from its normal position, assuming an appearance of great terror and respect when he saw the Baron's mustachios, and deporting himself generally in an ultra-pantomimic manner.

Upon being introduced to Fanny Hamper, Mr. Barnes was not at all shy, but directly told her that his purse was at her service, only he was afraid there was nothing in it, with similar pleasantries, which caused Miss Hamper to say apart to Sir Frederick, "What an absurd creature, to be sure!"

"How much is that?" asked Mr. Barnes, pointing to a bouquet of chenille flowers.

"Half-a-guinea," said Fanny Hamper.



Illustration of a Social Gathering



"And very cheap—very cheap indeed!" replied Mr. Barnes, in a loud voice. "Don't you think so, Sir?" he added, suddenly and sharply, to an old gentleman who was looking at the stall through his spectacles, having been deserted by his wife and daughters for the last hour.

"Eh! bless me! what? I beg your pardon, Sir?" exclaimed the old gentleman, quite startled by the sudden attack.

"These beautiful flowers, Sir," continued Mr. Barnes; "made entirely by the Duke of Wellington in the leisure of the Peninsular War. Half-a-guinea, Sir, for such a curiosity! Buy them, Sir; and let your heart bound at possessing such a relic."

And he put them into the old gentleman's hand, who began to examine them in wonder.

"Or this, Sir," said Mr. Barnes, taking up a military doll, and quite confusing his victim. "This interesting relic was dressed by Joan of Arc when she was in place, to amuse the son of her master. It represents a man-at-arms of the period. You see, Sir, it will go in any attitude—supplication, delight, agility, cringing servility—a guinea, Sir!"

Mr. Barnes put the doll, which was a jointed one, through all these postures as he spoke; and when he had finished, placed it also in the old gentleman's hand.

"And still more rarities, Sir," he went on, whilst Fanny Hamper hid her head for laughing, and so did Sir Frederick Arden, and both under the stall. "Still fresh curiosities. Some water-colour drawings from the wreck of the Royal George; and this pin-cushion, made like a guitar, from Pompeii; or this curious watch-paper cut out by the great Lord Brougham with his feet, for a wager, the night the Reform-bill passed, from the lining of his hat. Look, Sir—'Reform' is spelt on it, 'R, E, re; G, A, R, D, form, Reform': and going at the small charge of sixpence! Sixpence, Sir! I appeal to your feelings. You have a loved daughter—don't say no—I'm sure you have. Take them, Sir; take them, and be happy."

And he put them all into the old gentleman's hands, and then leaving them there, suddenly walked off to look at another stall, followed by Sir Frederick Arden, who told him that the butler had got some pale ale on the back staircase.

All this time Mr. Ellis had been exhibiting his views to as large parties as the glasses could accommodate, in the conservatory; and they were pronounced exquisitely faithful, even by those who had never seen the original places. Mrs. Hamper kept by the exhibition to receive the congratulations of the company upon her escape from the perils; and Sir Frederick Arden and his friend, having finished their Bass, began to write autographs, in the library, for Fanny Hamper's stall. And these she sold at good prices, especially Shaksperes.

"Well, Ellis, what are you getting?" asked the Baronet as he passed the other on the stairs.

"Rather tired," was the reply. "I wish you would relieve me."

"Oh, to be sure. What can I do?"

"Why, explain the views; but you have never been to Switzerland, have you?"

"No; but I could if I had chosen, so that makes no difference. Or my friend Barnes will; one of the right sort. This is Barnes."

The introduction was soon effected, Mr. Barnes shooting out his hand at a level with his eye, as comic people in a play give their cards. And then he looked through one of the peep-holes, and complained of not being tall enough to see; after which he took the envelope of a note from his pocket, put it carefully on the floor, stood upon it, and then pantomimically expressed the delight and gratification the views afforded him.

"You could shew these, Barnes, couldn't you?" asked Sir Frederick.

"Shew them! I should think so. Give me the list, and I'll tell them such stories as shall make their hair curl again. On we goes again."

Mr. Ellis shewed him the list of views pasted up at the side of the exhibition, and the strings belonging to them, and then went amongst the general company, leaving Mr. Barnes to collect an audience, which, as he was upon the stairs, he soon did, catching the people as they went up and down, in true showman-like fashion. "Be in time—we are now going to begin!" he said. "The view of Mont Blanc, and the Glacier des—stop a minute, let me see what it says—the Glacier des Bossons. Thank you, ma'am; a shilling, yes; I'll give you change directly."

And when he had filled all the peep-holes, he proceeded to explain the views, saying what came uppermost, and interlarding his description with scraps of poetry and comic songs, until the spectators got so confused that they did not at last know at all what they were looking at, and so could not contradict him.

"That's Mont Blanc," he said, "three times as high as Highgate Hill, and much higher than venison in warm weather, which Napoleon Buonaparte crossed with all his army when we went to fight the great St. Bernard at St. Helena. Observe the chamois to the left, standing on a pint of quartz. The chamois is an animal ingenious to the Alps, bounding as merrily as ever bosom where the song of freedom soundeth. It lives entirely upon snow and granite, and thaws away in the summer all but its hoofs, which stick in the ice, and sprout into fresh animals when the frost begins. That's Altorf, where William Tell shot an apple at his son for want of respect to his Governor Gessler. A conspiracy was formed, and the conspirators kept the secret, although they were always going to Tell; and when the governor levied the tax, Tell was toll'd."

"That's the Glacier des Bossons, where people go to eat real water ice without paying, being, as the poet observes,

'A world of wonders, where creation seems
As if all nature froze into ice creams.'

"Please to look at the Swiss boy in front of the view. He has just been aroused, taken his pail, and gone to labour away. The sun is up, as you observe, with ruddy beam, and you perceive the kine thronging to the stream; that is, you see the stream, but the kine are at present out of sight."

And in this manner did Mr. Barnes proceed, introducing, when the Baron came to see the views, a Swiss song, by way of complimenting him. The song was like one of those which Sir Frederick was familiar with at the Cider Cellars, and was supposed by Mr. Barnes to be the usual patois of the country. The Baron did not appear clearly to understand it; but he admired the views, and made very low obeisances to Mr. Barnes instead of paying him, which is not an uncommon affair with *Barons de société* generally.

"Oh, Frederick!" said Fanny Hamper to young Arden, upstairs. "I am so very thirsty. I would give anything for some wine and water."

"Try some bitter beer," suggested the Baronet.

"Oh, Frederick! shocking!"

"Not at all. You know all girls like it, only they are ashamed to say so. So they do Hansom cabs, eh? Fanny, 'c'uck! pst! that's your sort—isn't it?"

And Sir Frederick drove an imaginary horse, and recalled the affair of the Richmond ball to the young lady, so indiscreetly, that she was obliged to implore his silence.

"Fancy, Frederick," she exclaimed, "if mamma was ever to hear of it! How she did not is a wonder to me."

"Oh! I made it all right. I went to Mrs. Sadler you know next day, after a cricket match at Lord's; so I was ready for anything. She came down, looking like several blazes—"

"Now, Frederick, this dreadful language—"

"Well, looking like—oh! hang it—anything; but I took high ground, and I said that nobody knew it but ourselves; and that if she punished you, I would blow it everywhere, and do up her training stables at once. So I suppose she thought it best to keep dark, eh?"

"There—that will do," replied Fanny Hamper, fearful that somebody would overhear them. "Are you going to get me any refreshment?"

"To be sure. Ask Kate to mind your stall, and come with me. I know such a place!"

This was soon effected; and Fanny slipped out of the room with young Arden.

"Now look here," he said, "come into the conservatory, behind the views: it's nice and cool, and nobody can see you; and I'll go and get you some ices, or anything you like better."

Mr. Barnes, who was still exhibiting, and telling lies by the yard, readily admitted them into the penetralia of the Cosmorama,—for the views only occupied half the green-house, the flowers remaining

in the other part as usual. And when she was deposited here, Sir Frederick went down to the refreshment stall for some ices, and also crammed a bottle of pale ale—furnished by his friend the butler—into his pocket.

"There!" he said, as he returned, "I've got everything, and now make yourself at home: nobody can see us. How well you are looking to-day, Fanny!"

Meanwhile, the exhibition went on; and at last, Mrs. Hamper brought Mrs. Gudge to see the fearful position in which she had been placed on Mont Blanc: having found that lady sitting in the back drawing-room, not in the best temper at finding the little notice taken of her by the fashionable and distinguished company, who were running about her mansion.

"Now, Sir, if you please," said Mrs. Hamper to Mr. Barnes, "—perhaps my nephew has told you all about my perils—will you be so kind as to shew us the view of the ascent of Mont Blanc?—or, we will not trouble you—where is my Edward?"

Certainly not available just then: for Edward Ellis was ensconced quietly by the side of Kate Clifford, to the detriment of the commercial interests of her stall, in the abstraction of a first-rate violent flirtation.

"Never mind, Sir," said Mrs. Hamper; "perhaps you will be kind enough to shew the view, and I will explain. Now, my dear Mrs. Gudge, look here: it is exact."

But Mr. Barnes, not knowing the order that the views came in, and having hitherto pulled them at random, could not find the exact string; and, at last, what with letting one down, and drawing another up, he got them so confused, that he could not tell which was which; and, finally, pitching upon the wrong one altogether, he pulled it up, and discovered—not the view of Altorf, nor the Glacier des Bossons—not Mrs. Hamper being hauled along the neck of the precipice in her ascent of Mont Blanc—but the unmistakeable half-lengths of Fanny Hamper, and Sir Frederick Arden!—the precocious young Baronet with a glass of pale ale in one hand, and the other round the young lady's waist, whilst he was—the truth must out, at any risk—kissing her most desperately!

Mr. Barnes had just begun, "There you observe a view of Mont Blanc as it appeared—" when he was interrupted by a cry from Mrs. Hamper, and both ladies started back appalled from the glasses, then advanced again, as if to make sure of what they saw, then once more retreated, and looked at each other most unutterably.

"So, indeed!" said Mrs. Gudge, who was the first to speak, and very glad to do so, having been keeping all her indignation at not being more noticed, at interest in her bosom, until it had doubled itself over and over again, at as furious a rate as the nails of the horse's shoe do in the Tutor's Assistant. "So, indeed! and this, mam, is what my house is to be turned out of windows for, by you and your friends—*your* friends, mam."

"I—I am thunderstruck!" said Mrs. Hamper.

"And well you may be, mam—well you may be. But I see the use I have been made of: not for your Dorking charity—"

"Dorcas—"

"Dorcas, or Dorking, or Doorkeeper, mam; what's the difference when it comes to this? I see why you were so anxious for your daughter to keep a stall—that she might catch that young man—pah! that stripling! who you knew would be here. And, of course, I was nobody, oh, no! Perhaps all your friends would like to stay here to-night?—I can get a bed out if they would. Pray oblige me by asking them: your most obedient, humble servant, mam!"

And here Mrs. Gudge, making a low, ironical curtsy, backed against the Snashes—(who had stopped all day looking at the fashionable company, but had never bought anything.)—and nearly knocked them down stairs: upon which the Snashes immediately stopped a little longer, upon a quiet recommendation of Mr. Barnes to "see the row out."

"I really do not understand you, Mrs. Gudge," observed Mrs. Hamper, drawing herself up. "It is a pity you expose yourself in this manner."

"Expose, indeed!" replied the other; "and what do you call that exhibition there? You did not wish it known, I suppose, mam?"

"Why, madam!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamper. "Why you—but no, I won't forget that *I* am a lady. Do you mean to infer that I am a party to this unpleasant affair?"

"Oh, no!—I infer nothing: I am nobody. But I am somebody enough to have no more of this trash in my house. Charity, indeed! pah! Charity begins at home: and this is my home, after all, though nobody thinks so; and here I'll begin it next time. When I *do*, mam—when I *do*!"

Several more guests had collected hearing the noise, and the quarrel was now going on before an audience, in the midst of which Sir Frederick and Fanny Hamper bolted from the conservatory, and fled back to the drawing-room.

"We will stop the subject at present, if you please," said Mrs. Hamper, moving away.

"No, mam, we will not," said Mrs. Gudge. "It's all very well for you to stop it, now we have sold rubbish enough to put a hundred pounds in your pocket. And, perhaps, when the money is handed over to you, you'll remember seven-and-sixpence which you have owed me for years, and never so much as offered to pay. But, thank heaven, mam, I do not want it now. No! keep it, mam: I make you a present of it—you and your—pah!—your precious daughter there!"

"Come, I say," cried Sir Frederick, who returned from the bazaar-room just at this point, "none of that. Leave the girl alone. Pitch

into me as much as you like, but don't allude to her, or I'll go and insult your husband, and make him fight me."

"Bravo!" cried Mr. Barnes, enthusiastically; "for the man that would not lay down his life for an unprotected female, deserves—deserves—what the devil does he deserve?—never mind: it's all right."

"My dear aunt," said Mr. Ellis, who just now arrived, "let me entreat of you to come away."

"Of course!" cried Mrs. Gudge, "go away; now you have done all the mischief you can. But I shall not overlook this. Go away—to be sure: and take all your trash and trumpery with you. It's all your's, pack and package: don't leave any of it to disgrace my house. I wash my hands of the whole affair."

And here Mrs. Gudge bounced off to look after her husband. But the head of the establishment had got so bored, hours ago, with playing the gentleman to a lot of people he did not care two pence about, that he had left the house, and plunging into the first omnibus he came near, had gone down to Putney; where, whilst this tempest was going on in his establishment, he was having a quiet dinner to himself, looking upon the cool water from one of the river-side cabinets of the Eight Bells. So that Mrs. Gudge, in her anguish, was fain to have recourse to Mrs. Snash, whom she had neglected all day, and to beg she would come up stairs with her to her boudoir.

Mrs. Snash, good woman, could condole to any amount; and, indeed, was never so happy as when haunting afflicted families. She immediately entered keenly into all Mrs. Gudge's views of the wrongs she had endured, even to weeping with her—in which she was also very great—until that lady was a little tranquillized.

At the same time, the company took their departure, Mrs. Hamper only waiting to collect an account of the money taken from the stall-keepers; whilst those young ladies remained very happily in the drawing-room, with their conquests of the morning, until the time came for the Gudge landau to convey them to Lady Parlamar's, who had asked them to a friendly carpet-dance she was about to have that evening.

"How very indiscreet of you, Fanny," said Mrs. Hamper to her daughter, as they went home in a cab, "to put yourself in that situation! And in such a house too!"

Miss Hamper made no reply, but looked out of the window; and so her mother did not pursue the subject any further, but wondered if there was anything in it; thought it a pity Sir Frederick was so young; and agreed it would not be so bad if her daughter came to be Lady Arden, after all.

CHAPTER XLIV.

CHRISTOPHER GETS UP A LECTURE, AND REHEARSES IT AT THE JOLLY MAN'S.

CHRISTOPHER did not sleep a great deal that night. His head was so full of his scheme, that, although somewhat tired, his thoughts and plans kept him half awake until grey morning came through the window of his room. We say half awake, for from time to time he fell into a light doze, in which the subject of his thoughts still kept before his eyes, distorted in a strange manner as partial unconsciousness operated upon it. And then he fancied that he was addressing hundreds of thousands of people, going up higher and higher, in a vast amphitheatre around him, until they were lost in the distance; whilst he himself was in a temple composed of working steam-engines and air-pumps which perpetually coined money.

The choice of a subject was the first great question; and this he talked over and over again with Sprouts, as they studied the list of lectures for the season. The most attractive required heavy and cumbersome apparatus: those which merely consisted in reading a discourse, did not, as Tom had before told him, do much service. Geology could be expounded with diagrams, but required a great deal of knowledge of the subject—more than Christopher, in his Italian hotels, had been able to pick up; and people did not care about Astronomy, unless there was a transparent orrery, to give it the air of a magic-lantern exhibition. If Christopher had been a musician, he would have got up an entertainment on the songs of somewhere or other; but the difficulty consisted, besides, in finding out some nook of the earth, whose national stock of melodies had not been long ago exhausted. Indeed it was very puzzling to find a subject at all.

At last Tom recollected that there was a book in his library which was a great favourite, having been almost thumbed to pieces; and he thought that from it a good lecture might be made. Fortunately it was at home; and he brought it, with great glee to Christopher, assured that something might be done with it.

"There!" he said, somewhat proudly, as he placed the book on the table; "that will make your fortune. Lots of pictures; capital ones too, and all easy to copy."

It was the octavo volume of Strutt's "Sports and Pastimes," full of wood-cuts from the old manuscripts.

"Fancy painting these in gay colours," said Tom; "blue, and scarlet, and green; and gilding them with Dutch metal! They're not hard to draw neither."

They certainly were not. The performers were in such quaint attitudes, and wore such long shoes, and appeared so regardless of the cut of their

clothes, that a mistake in drawing them either way would have made little difference.

"Here's your sort," continued Tom, quite delighted at his suggestion, as he turned the leaves rapidly over. "Look here—the 'Quintain'—isn't that a go? And here's a 'Cock dancing on Stilts,' and a 'Hare beating the tabor,—my!—and 'Kayles'—that's ninepins—ho, ho! look here: 'Anglo-Saxon dance!' Well; I think I could do that."

And Sprouts put himself into one or two strange attitudes forthwith, until recalled by Christopher.

"I really believe we could make something of this," he said. "It would be very showy, and likely to catch the eye. At all events I will try and copy one of these, just by way of experiment. This Tumbler of the fourteenth century seems an active bird. Here goes."

There were colour boxes in Sprouts's shop window; but they only contained the paints of childhood—little hard gritty squares of some composition, which usually refused to be rubbed on the back of a plate at all with any effect; but if they did, all gave one colour whatever their hue, and that was generally a dull brickly red. But for a penny what could be expected! The sixpenny sets to be sure were in varnished sliding boxes, with a pocket-book view on the top, to colour which, the first endeavours of the young artists usually tended, before they aspired to Mr. Hicks as the Wizard of the Wave; but these also were of the same disappointing manufacture; and even when finished with the greatest care and nicest eye to effect, Mr. Hicks had a washed-out appearance, which suggested that the wave of which he was the wizard, had great power over him. The children sighed for the brilliant hues of the 'twopence coloured' prints—for the dazzling red of the couch on which the young lady with the short waist and ringlets was asleep, on the frontespiece of the dream-books—for the bright blue that made the frock-coated lover on the valentine so captivating—for the ruby crimson of the port wine on the Twelfth Night characters, that swelled beyond the outline of the decanter. But these were never attainable. Perhaps it was as well; for it mingled instruction with amusement, and read a lesson to the young artists in their earliest years, how futile it was to think that anything would wear the same bright tints in reality, as those with which the prismatic anticipations of youth invested it.

Christopher, however, procured some colours from Mr. Chirpey—startling pigments with which the gay placards on his vans were rendered catching to the eye; and with these, on a large sheet of cartridge paper, he produced a copy of the Tumbler of the fourteenth century, so very effective, that Sprouts begged to be permitted to hang it in his window, where it attracted such a crowd of children, that he had enough to do all day, to answer applications for tops, hoopsticks and shuttlecocks which tumbled down the grating as they hustled one another to flatten their noses against the panes. And when one of these was broken, it was thought time enough to close the exhibition.

Christopher worked so hard, that in a week he had got all the most striking illustrations of the book copied, in large, upon his sheets of paper. He hung them round his bed-room until they covered the walls; and then he filled Tom's parlour as well; and his ambition extending with his success, he produced so many, and such large ones, that he had at last no room for them anywhere. But the jolly man gave him up the entire use of the long workshop, which had been hired by the friends of 'The People' as the National Palladium for the encouragement of the Rights of Man and Progress, and never paid for; and here Christopher finished his task with such effect that, as the jolly man observed, "it was as good as a show—that it was."

The next point was to arrange his lecture, condensing from the book, and putting the matter into as entertaining a form as he could, so that it might not last much beyond an hour, which period no lecture upon anything ought to exceed; and when this had all been done, and written fairly out, his preparatory work was accomplished.

But there must be a rehearsal—of course a rehearsal was imperative, Tom observed: curious at the same time to see and hear what Christopher had got together: and the workshop would be the very place to give it in. And he must have an audience too; not any strangers, but just a few of his own friends, that he might see what talking to an assembly was like. Mr. and Mrs. Chirpey, and Tom and Bessy would make four; and Skittles would come directly, if he was asked, and bring Patsy, and Hickory too, with whom Christopher had a great deal to talk about. This was agreed to be an excellent plan, and the evening was accordingly fixed—an off-night at Vauxhall being determined upon, to suit the convenience of some of the party.

The workshop was a very comical place, and startled feeble-minded persons when they first went into it; but when they recovered their wits they were exceedingly amused. Mr. Chirpey's business extended to street advertising generally, in addition to his vans; and most of the gigantic models and figures set up by the shops to attract the notice of the public emanated from his workshop. Besides the great dust-pans, and gridirons, and tea-pots—the gigantic hats and mighty red boots before alluded to, the manufactory produced objects of a higher degree of art. From his workshops came the gay Highlanders who were always on the point of taking a pinch of snuff at tobacconists doors; and the sober Chinese also who reposed in all weathers on tea-chests over the shop-windows. Even the tight fat little harlequins, who rode the rocking-horses at the toy-shops emanated from the jolly man's establishment; and he had produced more white harts, bears, red lions, bulls and mouths, and cocks and bottles than did Noah at the conclusion of the deluge when he disembarked his animals and stores. So that, what with these creations in progress, and those that had come to be repaired, the long loft had an odd aspect enough.

In this place, then, did Christopher determine to give his lecture, all in proper form, with a table and two candles and a tumbler and decanter of water—which, as Mr. Chirpey observed, if ever he felt nervous might have a little gin in it without anybody being able to

detect the difference. All the afternoon, he and Skittler were occupied in putting up the diagrams ; and the latter personage also moved some of the productions of which Mr. Chirpey was the Frankenstein, from their nooks, into the centre of the workshop where the audience were to be stationed. An old van taken from its wheels formed, with its canvass walls, a lecturer's room : and stools were placed for the company as far as they went, and when there were no more, whatever else answered the purpose.

The evening came ; and as soon as Tom had closed his shop they all assembled at Mr. Chirpey's, and were marshalled to the workshop, where they were allowed a little time to admire the diagrams and wonder what they were about, before the lecture commenced. The ladies were accommodated with the seats, Mrs. Chirpey, Bessy and Patsy being together ; whilst Skittler perched himself upon a lion who had come in to be fresh gilt, and Hickory and Mr. Chirpey took their places on a work-bench. An invitation had been forwarded to Professor Fandango, but he had a private class that evening and could not come.

"Curous things enough—they is," said Skittler, as his eye ran over the diagram. "There's a man playing with three balls and three knives just as they do now, and Christopher says its eight hundred years old. Nothing new under the sun, as I told Bill Haines, when he first started the Happy Family at Waterloo Bridge. Noah beat him all to nothing. I never could make out though, how he got the cats and tarriers to go comfortable together."

"How very beautiful they look with all that gold," said Bessy.

"Capital !" replied Skittler : "but he won't have a ghost all I can do. I says to him, 'no matter what stuff the entertainment is, saving your presence, but a ghost is sure to make a hit.' If he would only be persuaded to have one, with a Bengal light, at the finish, he'd make his fortune."

"But you see Skitty, it hasn't anything to do with the subject," observed Sprouts.

"Oh—that's nothink : it frightens some and amuses others. I'm always for a ghost, I am."

"We are quite ready now, I think," said Mrs. Chirpey.

"Very good," replied Skittler : "then here goes to begin."

Upon which he commenced a series of whistles and cries peculiar to the galleries of theatres, when the occupants imagine it is later than is actually the case, which is an hallucination under which they frequently labour. This had the effect of bringing forward Christopher, who had waited in his retiring-room, and his appearance was the signal for pre-concerted applause, which he acknowledged in so polite a manner, that the acclamations were renewed ; and then drinking a little water, as is proper, and taking a wand in his hand, he commenced his lecture, Skittler acting as fogleman for the approbation, which was judiciously thrown in from time to time. He also had a pint of beer, from which he refreshed himself whenever any allusions in the lecture were beyond his comprehension.



Illustration of a Magic Lantern Show

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and dates, which appears to be a record of some kind. The names are written in a cursive script, and the dates are in a more formal, printed style. The list is organized into two columns, with names on the left and dates on the right. The names are: John Smith, James Brown, and William Jones. The dates are: 1810, 1811, and 1812. The list is followed by a section of text that is also written in cursive. This text appears to be a description of the events that took place during the period covered by the list. It mentions the names of the individuals listed and describes their actions and the circumstances surrounding them. The text is written in a clear, legible hand, and it is organized into paragraphs. The first paragraph describes the events of 1810, the second paragraph describes the events of 1811, and the third paragraph describes the events of 1812. The text is followed by a section of text that is also written in cursive. This text appears to be a summary of the events that took place during the period covered by the list. It mentions the names of the individuals listed and describes their actions and the circumstances surrounding them. The text is written in a clear, legible hand, and it is organized into paragraphs. The first paragraph describes the events of 1810, the second paragraph describes the events of 1811, and the third paragraph describes the events of 1812. The text is followed by a section of text that is also written in cursive. This text appears to be a summary of the events that took place during the period covered by the list. It mentions the names of the individuals listed and describes their actions and the circumstances surrounding them. The text is written in a clear, legible hand, and it is organized into paragraphs. The first paragraph describes the events of 1810, the second paragraph describes the events of 1811, and the third paragraph describes the events of 1812.

Christopher went on explaining his pictures; telling them such wonderful things—how the young Londoners used to skate in Finsbury, which Skittler shook his head at, having no idea of any such sport there, except cutting out slides on the pavement, for which he narrowly escaped imprisonment by the beadle, when a boy. And then he showed them the water-quintain, which was a post in the river, and this being rowed at very fast, had the effect of throwing the players into the water; 'which' Mr. Chirpey remarked, 'he had seen played often at Putney Bridge when gentlemen came up in little boats after dining at the Bells.' Besides this, he showed them Herodias tumbling to amuse the Court, at which Bessy blushed, and the jolly man pretended to be scared and hid his face, and hoped the ladies did not do so at Court now-a-days: whereat Mrs. Chirpey told him not to be so absurd, but to listen to what Christopher was saying.

And when he told them about Blondel and Richard, Skittler said that was just the way he found out a pardner of his in the round-house, imprisoned for stealing poultry on Banstead Downs at Epsom race-time,—he whistled "For 'tis my delight of a shiny night" and his pardner answered it with the verse of an Anacreontic song, with a burden commencing "For I likes a drop of good beer" by which token he knew who it was, and eventually procured his release—but it was a great secret—by unroofing the round-house.

May-day, too, with all its old glories, was touched on by Christopher; and then Bessy hoped she should hear something about the little boy who came down the castle chimney and went to sleep in the very state bed in which he had been born, and so was found to be a young nobleman. But when Christopher said there was no truth at all in the story, the sweeps' rejoicings simply originating in the fact of their labours being in a great measure over, for the summer, she was half angry. And at the account of the milkmaids' garland of plate, Hickory shook his head, and said he didn't think that families would lend their silver spoons and tea-pots now-a-days to be carried about Clerkenwell or the Borough; and at the Cock upon Stilts they all laughed so heartily that Tom inwardly resolved to drive the first old fowl that he found in the court, into his shop, and see if such a feat had ever been accomplished. These and many more subjects did Christopher touch upon, to the great delight of his audience. Indeed when he finished they declared it was the most entertaining thing they had ever heard; and they were all sure he would get loads of money by it, and come back quite a rich man.

Mr. Chirpey had insisted upon their all stopping to supper at his house; and therefore his wife had retired a little before the conclusion of the discourse, to look after the provisions; but she did not wish this known, so she said she thought baby wanted her. And then, when they followed her they found every thing ready—such sausages that had blown up and burst from very richness, as they lay upon a mountain of mashed potatoes—such bright pewter pots of porter, and jugs of the jolly man's peculiar tap, (which was so strong, as he told them, that it took twenty men and four horses to brew it, but was famous stuff for

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making the hair curl)—such knobbly loaves, and ripe cheese, and stinging pickles, as were delightful to contemplate. Be sure that full justice was done to them. Hickory and Skittler did not like, at first, to sit down at the table: but Mr. Chirpey was quite indignant at such a feeling on their parts, for, as he said, his friend's friends were his friends as much as if he'd known them all their lives. Sprouts sat next to Bessy of course, and it was observed that they both ate constantly with one hand only, from which a suspicion was excited that they were shaking hands with the others, all supper time, under the table; and such proved to be the case, when Mr. Chirpey wickedly dropped a piece of bread, and bobbed quickly down to look after it. But this only made more merriment.

When "something hot" was brought in after supper, Skittler opened his mind to Christopher.

"I've been a thinking," he observed, "of something that may be of great use to you. How are you going to travel?"

"I don't know I'm sure," replied the other: "as I can. I have not a great deal of money to start with, so I must get along in the cheapest way."

"I'll put you up to it," said Skittler. "My old Tagglony go-cart has got a good deal of go in her yet. She's rather cranky, to be sure, and scroops a bit, and don't look as she did by the side of the fresh'uns: but a little paint would do a good deal for her. Now I was thinking if you was to travel with it, what a thing it would be."

"But how?"

"How? why, as I did—with the donkey. He's very old too, but he'd do his twenty miles a day now comfortably. He'd pull all your things; and yourself too, when you were tired; and his keep would be nothing. Besides, Hickory here, will show you how to make the finest tent possible with a few bent sticks: and then as long as summer lasts, you know, you needn't trouble the inns and lodging-houses much: eh?"

There really seemed so much worth attending to, in Skittler's proposal, that Christopher listened to it seriously; and being assured that the "Tagglony" was not wanted by his friend, he accepted the offer. The determination was immediately made public; and everybody was so delighted with the idea, and made Christopher so many promises of things to take with him, to be useful on his expedition, that a broad wheeled waggon would not have contained them. But Mr. Chirpey promised him the canvass for his tent, and a waterproof covering for his waggon; and other things were recommended and accepted; and such a new turn was given to the conversation by the subject, that time went on until the little hours came to warn them how the night was flying. And then they all wished each other hearty good nights and retired home. Skittler walking with Christopher, under pretence of making further suggestions, but in reality to let Tom and Bessy come on unobserved behind, which they always liked best to do.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE EXPEDITION STARTS.

IN two or three days all was ready for the young lecturer's departure. Mr. Chirpey had the Taglioni into his yard, to be overlooked, put to rights and painted; and Christopher collected just so many things as he found likely to be useful. Bessy made him a long oil-skin bag for his diagrams; and an old soldier's knapsack contained his wardrobe. Hickory superintended the packing of his tent, and Mrs. Chirpey gave him some things to make up a bed with, which fitted the bottom of the cart when on the travel, and made it more comfortable. And in the general line of stores, Sprouts came out wonderfully.

Out and away from the great thoroughfares, but near his court, in a little bye-street, the houses of which were tenanted by the humblest individuals, he knew a shop entirely devoted to the sale of rubbish. It was not an old curiosity shop. There were no dark, carved cabinets, nor worm-eaten drawers, nor ancient straight-bodied chairs whose very appearance suggested lumbago. Neither would you easily have found any old china: and as for quart decanters and drinking-glasses, or embossed brass-dishes, or cumbrous matchlocks or rusting arbalists, or murderous snap-haunces, you might as well have inquired for pine-apple ice at an ironmonger's. Old enough every thing was, to be sure—carpenters' tools, clocks and musical instruments: old enough to be almost entirely useless, but not sufficiently venerable to become valuable. The things were bought nevertheless; the unmatched boot-hooks, and odd knives and forks, and old cornets-à-pistons without crooks or valves, or mouth-pieces, found purchasers somehow or other: and even the books, of which there were three or four old tea-chests full, of the most incomprehensible and uninteresting literature—second volumes of cramped theological treatises, and essays on, or accounts of subjects long passed away or superseded—even these disappeared. In fact, sooner or later, there was a buyer here for every thing, from the three blacking brushes at a shilling to the cracked phrenological head at the same price—from the old bottle-jack that no longer wound up, to the carpenters' vice; the screw which had no longer the power of bringing its bites together.

Sprouts, from constantly passing, knew the stock of the shop almost as well as the proprietor: and, after minute inspection of their durability, he purchased a small kettle, a saucepan, and a frying-pan for an incredibly small sum, which were added to the stores. The day before he left, Patay came and put a small basket into the cart, in which Christopher found a cup and saucer, a plate, knife and fork, and spoon; which, but for her forethought, would have been overlooked altogether. Lastly, Skittler shewed him an odd little box nailed to the under part of the cart, in which he could keep his money safely, as nobody would

ever think of looking after it ; and then, with an important admonition never to be without a knife or bit of string, the stores were pronounced complete.

It was difficult to tell whether hope or fear had the strongest hold on Christopher's anticipations of his venture. Vivid recollections of part of his early career, rendered the life he was about to lead less strangely novel than it would have been to many others ; but yet he felt his way was not very clear before him. His lecture might not prove an attractive subject ; he might be ill on the way, or get into bad hands ; or he might find himself in the middle of England without friends or money. But, on the other hand, the perfect independence of the excursion, and the desire he had to penetrate the mystery that clouded his birth and earliest years, urged him on with most exciting impulse. In many conversations he had held with Hickory, the old showman had given him all the information he could, connected with the latter subject ; and on this he determined to act.

At last, all being ready, the day of his departure came. It was a fine bright morning, and thus far was cheering enough ; but Christopher felt somewhat depressed when the minute arrived, at parting from his friends, all of whom had been so utterly disinterested in their kindness. Skittler came to "see him out of London," as he said ; and all of them collected at Tom's little shop to wish him good bye, until they almost filled it. Even the children in the court, seeing so many people assembled, imagined that something wonderful was going on, and loitered about the library ; and when Christopher, at last, started—he was a long time about it though—and Tom gave a faint huzzah, the little people cheered too—heartier and louder perhaps, but not more earnestly—and ran by him until he turned the corner ; when, perceiving that he, with his companion, were not about to balance the donkey on their chins, pick up sixpences backwards with their eyelids, or stand upon one another's heads to beg coppers from the first floor windows, they relinquished the pursuit.

They did not attract any attention as they went through London ; for everybody was, as usual, too much occupied with their own affairs, to look after other people. Christopher, in a common velveteen shooting jacket and overalls appeared of the same genus as Skittler ; and the latter person, as he approached the north of London, got out of the beat of his acquaintance, so that there were no interruptions to their progress. And they went on, chatting together until the way got clearer, and the long streets of houses broke into rows and terraces, then into detached buildings with gardens ; and finally the road was bordered with trees and hedges. Here Skittler insisted upon 'having a pint' at the last public house they saw upon the road, and also was considerably offended at the offer of Christopher to pay for it : then, drinking success to him from the bottom of his heart to the bottom of the pewter pot, and as much ill-fortune and general misery to Gudge as a Christian wish could be permitted to comprise, he wished him good bye.

"Marlyman"—that was the donkey's name—"Marlyman's a good

'un," said Skittler, "and will eat anything: and when you haven't got it, he will go without. He's been used to that sort of game often. Look after his shoes, and don't use pins to get him on, more than you can help. Good bye, young feller!"

He wrung Christopher's hand so earnestly, that the fingers were numbed for ten minutes afterwards; and then repeating some rough, but honest good wishes, he stood waving his hat until the other turned the corner of the road, when he retraced his path towards home, and Christopher went on his way alone.

His heart was not very light: and he turned back and looked somewhat fondly upon hazy London, before he went over the brow of the hill: for he had met with kinder spirits there than he imagined were in the world, in the little circle of which Sprouts's humble shop was the centre; and he could not tell what fortune was in store for him. But as he gazed and heard the distant buzz of life and varied sound of the bells come up to him on the bright morning air, he thought how, in the old times, when the traveller from London lost himself at once in flowery meadows and green lanes, and long arching avenues of leafy trees shading the hilly roads with their dancing shadows—how, in a similar way, the little orphan had heard Bow bells, and gathered hope, and energy, and spirits from their sound; and the very notion removed half the heaviness from his heart in an instant. And when he had crossed the hill, and the fresh sweet country opened to his view on the other side, his spirits rose so wonderfully, that he sang aloud for a few minutes, as he walked by the cart.

For there is still fair scenery about London—uplands as picturesque, meadows as deeply green, and villages as snugly sheltered in quiet nooks and hollows, as you would find elsewhere all over England. And this within a walk that the laziest pedestrian would not take half an ordinary day to accomplish, there and back. But we think nothing of what is so easily within our grasp; in fact, we regard the suburban country with the same feelings, as we should a person met with in a circle to which he had no right of admission—rather with contempt than otherwise.

Christopher went on, quite at his ease: for the donkey required little attention, having been so long used to follow his leader, in the service of Skittler. They passed through several villages attracting little notice, and at length made their first halt at a little road-side inn, four or five miles from town, for rest and refreshment, as well as to alter a part of the harness, which, not being in first rate order, required some attention.

He was sitting on the bench at the door, cutting his small loaf with the knife he had been recommended to carry, when he saw, coming up the road, a party of persons, all marching steadily after one another like policemen, in single file; and as they came nearer, he perceived that several of them had tin candle-boxes slung over their shoulders, by bits of string. They were mostly young men, and their dress was respectable enough; but they kept shouting,

laughing and singing in a manner which made their very orderly progression more remarkable. They came up to the inn; and then, seating themselves about on some benches placed outside, and rapping loudly with their sticks on the tables in front, called the waiter.

"Now then!" cried one of the party. "Hi! house! is anybody at home?"

"Did you call, sir," said the waiter—a frightened-looking man, with a dirty napkin under his arm, who appeared from the house.

"Who? I? Oh no—not by any means any how," replied the first speaker, looking very vacant at the inquirer.

"Don't sell him like that, Barnes," said another. "Ullow, young crumb-brusher; what sort of swizzle do you keep here?"

"Swizzle, sir?—yes sir," answered the waiter, not exactly knowing what to reply.

"Drink, I mean," the other continued; "lush!—will that do?"

"We've some very fine old port, sir," said the man, wiping nothing off one of the tables, and our pale sherry is particularly recommended."

A stare of bewilderment, from all the party, succeeded this announcement. They first looked at one another, then at the waiter, and then burst into a loud horse-laugh in his face, confusing the man terribly, and not improving his condition when Mr. Barnes—the friend we have already met—took the hat from the head of the person next to him, put it on the waiter's, knocked it down over his eyes, and then, exclaiming in a Clown's voice, "I saw him do it, sir!" made a face of hideous distortion, rammed his hands into his pockets until they appeared to go down to his calves, made himself knock-knees, walked on his toes turned in, and broke into an unearthly laugh. The waiter removed the hat "perfectly circumslogdologized" as the Persians observe, Mr. Barnes remarked in his natural voice, "and served him right, for thinking botanical medical students ever perpetrated such low improbabilities as port and sherry."

Christopher's eyes were now opened to the class of the new comers. He found they were students on an excursion to collect botanical specimens: and had halted for refreshment, their strange method of marching being one of the countless diversions young gentlemen of their order are apt to indulge in in public.

These trips are common at the schools; and belong to the most insane department of a medical man's education. But its study is insisted on; since everybody appears to admit the importance of botanical knowledge in the management of a fractured arm, or knows the value of buttercups, daisies, and stinging-nettles in consumption, cancer, or hooping-cough. All botanical lectures, however, present a pleasing uniformity of subject to the students. They see very pretty drawings of gigantic leaves very nicely painted green, and also diagrams of various odd tissues, like magnified pieces of net and cambric. They are shewn a great quantity of half-dead flabby "garden-stuff," which

makes them lament they do not keep rabbits in the dissecting-room to eat it ; and, moreover, they learn to call dandelions and chickweed by numerous intricate names, well calculated to raise the importance of such humble vegetable productions, and make them think no small sap of themselves. But if this was all, the lecturers could never keep up the attention of the students during the course. As Mr. Barnes observed, he had been very much disappointed in following it : his ideas of botany had always been connected with visions of pretty girls holding small green water-pots, painted red inside, and tending geraniums in fragrant conservatories : but he found it quite different when he began to study it in earnest.

This, however, is a digression ; we were about to say that the lecturers keep up the interest by proposing various enterprising botanical excursions every week during the season, when the students generally consume an immense quantity of cheese and biscuits, drink a great deal of half-and-half, collect a few wild weeds from the hedges into tin candle-boxes, and come home—not exactly tipsy, but as Mr. Barnes remarked “all nohow, like a wasp in a whirlwind”—in any inbound omnibus, if they have sixpence left to pay the fare—a contingent not necessarily incidental to their peregrinations.

A pretty strong muster the present party made under the management of Mr. Barnes ; such a collection of hooky sticks, metal weed-cases, and fifteen-penny note-books had never before been collected together : and in honour to Mr. Barnes himself—and the subject—the flower of their hospital had collected together. There was Mr. Cuff who used to change his coat and boots which he kept in his locker, every day at three o'clock after anatomical lecture, and then go and sit an hour in a straight-backed coat on one of the chairs that are nailed to the floor in the upstairs gallery of the Pantheon, and fancy himself a man about town : and Messrs. Rubby and Shorts, two men from Leeds, with thick blucher boots and no straps, who used to “prepare for the Hall” with a private tutor holding his class at a public-house, and allowing beer and pipes during the examination. There were also a lot of reading-men, who boasted that they had dissected the neck five distinct times, and copied all the lecture diagrams into the fly leaves of their books ; and who, moreover, used to wait for half an hour at the door of the school to touch their hats to the lecturers. Mr. Bowles was also there, who had “ground” for five years and was always “going up in about a fortnight :” and Mr. Jowlett who took a disgust to anatomy because he once made an inflated preparation which somebody stuck a pin into before it was dry ; with some others, headed by Mr. Barnes, who invented all the misrule of the school.

“Halloo, my boy,” cried the latter gentleman to Christopher, as the waiter, recovered from his astonishment, was ordered to bring some of “the commingled”—which meant half-and-half. “What have you got there—ginger-beer, periwinkles or snuff-boxes ?”

“No,” answered Christopher smiling. “I havn’t got anything to sell.”

“Well, have you got anything to give away, then,” continued Mr.

Barnes, "because we are not proud. What *have* you got ; what's in here ?"

"It's a lecture," replied Christopher.

"Oh—thank you," said Mr. Barnes : "we get enough of that kind of fun at home. But you don't lecture yourself ?"

And he said this enquiringly, as he looked at Christopher's attire, which was not exactly that of a professor.

"I am going to try," the other replied good temperedly. "It's on our Ancient Sports and Pastimes."

"Ancient Times and Passports," observed Mr. Barnes ; "ah,—very good. Who was Blind Hookey ? any relation to Walker ?"

"I really don't know," remarked the other.

"It's an old game though. Won't you show us what you've got ? I say, you fellows, I've caught a lecturer."

They were gathering round Christopher to inspect his cart more narrowly than he wished, when one of the men cried out, "Here's Bulb coming !" and this announcement had the effect of diverting their attention. For Dr. Bulb was their professor, and a real enthusiast in his subject ; he was also a great favourite with the students, filling up all their schedules, whether they attended or no, and putting 'very diligently' to all. He had appointed to meet his class here ; and up to the present moment had been luxuriating with a little hoe, almost hidden in a ditch opposite the inn, with two of his house pupils, who were now looking over their treasures and squabbling as to whether a 'lanium' as they called it—a plant very like a nettle, stung or not : and at last they found it did.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said Dr. Bulb, as he advanced towards them, looking, with all his specimens, like a scientific jack in the green ; and plunging at once into the middle of his subject. "Botany is derived from the Greek word *Borávn* a *plant* ; and signifies that portion of natural history connected with the vegetable world."

"That's his introductory lecture," said Mr. Barnes, quietly to Mr. Cuff, at the same time sticking a long bull-rush up the collar of his coat.

"The productions of the teeming earth," continued the Doctor, "furnish to us an inexhaustible fund of scientific and gratifying amusement."

"That's his idea," whispered Mr. Bowles. "A man must be mighty hard up for friends to amuse himself with the society of a buttercup. It's not a very convivial flower."

"And rivet our attention," resumed the Doctor, "by their admirable combinations."

Here Mr. Barnes suggested "lobster salad" as the most eligible.

"We are in a fortunate locality, gentlemen," said the Doctor : "for following our researches : this is one of the richest floral spots about London. I propose that we begin to collect at once, to save time."

This was the signal to begin ; and as there were lots of green banks and patches of wild vegetation about the inn, they commenced their

investigation—Mr. Barnes, however, remaining with Christopher, and insisting upon his sharing his beer with him, previously to enquiring further into the contents of the waggon, of the baggage of which, the appearance of the handle of a frying-pan, and the spout of a tea-kettle gave him mysterious notions.

In a few minutes the Doctor was fully employed. First, his pupils picked up every green thing they came across, and asked him its name; then they wrote the name on a little slip of paper, and showed it to him to see if it was right; then they deposited it in their candle-boxes; and after that all went to work again with enthusiastic ardour, until three or four new men made a savage rush at one forget-me-not, and all tumbled into a ditch together.

"Hurrah! who's afraid?" cried Mr. Barnes looking on, most inexpressibly delighted at the accident, more especially as Mr. Cuff had new boots on, and the bottom of the ditch was yellow clay. "There's your animated water-cresses, Doctor. Don't fight in the ditch, boys. Have it out all fair upon the road."

Hereupon the new men began mutual recrimination, and one turned sulky and went home at once. Dr. Bulb softened the irritated feelings of the remainder, by promising to lead them to some spot where they would find plenty more forget-me-nots; and Mr. Cuff went into a beer-shop to get his trowsers scraped by the pot-boy, and have a new polish put on what Mr. Barnes called, his patent argillaceous overalls.

As soon as good humour was restored again, and the new men had got over their annoyance at having their new clothes covered with clay, (and regular tailor's-bill reformers they were—two pound ten coats and guinea trowsers), they proceeded once more to collect their herbage. The Doctor was most indefatigable in his researches. He climbed over hurdles and arches for weeds and water-plants—he scaled the fences of cottagers' gardens after queer flowers he saw from the road; and was of course blown up by the old women for trespassing—he over-stretched all his muscles in straining after creeping parasites; and finally, declared he was so hungry that he thought some little refreshment would be advisable to infuse new sap into his circulation, and revive his vascular tissues. This was the signal for a general halt, much to the joy of the botanizers, and a council was immediately formed to decide in what manner the expedition should feed.

"We have made an admirable collection," said Dr. Bulb. "And here is a curiosity—a daisy seen but seldom out of Italy. Dear me! I forget the name. We collected them when I studied at Pisa."

Christopher, who had been listening all this time, modestly observed: "*Pratellina*."

"Hey day!" said the Doctor, looking round: "what, do you speak Italian? Who are you, my man?"

"I was a waiter, a little time ago, at Leghorn and Venice," said Christopher: "and now I am a lecturer—at least I am going to be one."

"Explain yourself," returned the Doctor, looking at Christopher and his turn-out with rather a scrutinizing eye.

Our hero told his story in a very few words: but he had some little difficulty in persuading the Professor that he was actually intending a journey through England with only his present paraphernalia.

"I believe it," said Mr. Barnes; "and very jolly too. When Cuff and I go up to the Hall, if we are plucked we mean to cut the profession and turn vagabonds. He's got an old boat, something like a used-up omnibus put into a punt, and we intend to live on the river. I wish I was going with you," he continued to Christopher: "you don't want an assistant, do you?"

"No, I think not," said Christopher, smiling, as he inwardly mistrusted Mr. Barnes's active aid. "I can manage the whole of it myself."

There was a pleasing intelligence in Christopher's manner that caught the Doctor at once: and, leaving the pupils to arrange their refreshment themselves, he had a long talk with him. And finally, he said:

"There is an old friend of mine—he was anatomical demonstrator when I first began to study medicine—who may be useful to you, if you get to Salwich in the salt countries—Doctor Aston. I have not heard from him for several years now, but I know he's alive."

Christopher's face brightened as the other spoke. He remembered the good old man, as well, although he had not seen him since the night he ran away from the mine. But he did not mention this, foreseeing it must lead to a great many inquiries on the part of the other, which would be very difficult for him, if not unpleasant, to reply to.

"If you come across that gentleman," continued Doctor Bulb, taking a card from his pocket-book, and pencilling on it, "give him this: and I am sure, for my sake, he will assist your views, if it is in his power. You are young to begin, but I approve your pluck. You must take something with us."

Christopher had finished his own modest luncheon: but he liked the friendly spirit of his new acquaintances, so he accepted their invitation.

"Gentlemen," said Dr. Bulb: "I propose that we should follow the plan pursued on former excursions. Let us purchase a quantity of eggs and ham in the village, and they will cook them for us at this inn, and supply us with what little beer may be necessary."

"Hear! hear!" shouted Mr. Barnes, who had climbed up the sign-post for the purpose of improving the features of the Red Lion painted on it, with a piece of chalk, by adding mustachios, a cocked hat, a pipe, and other facetious adjuncts.

"I repeat, gentlemen," continued the Doctor, half angry and half laughing, "you can procure your malt-liquor here, if you must have it."

The new men, who had gravely attended to the Doctor's speech, bowing their heads to him at every period, readily acquiesced, of course—new men always do to what a lecturer says: and as they were in sufficient numbers to have out-voted the old stagers—another thing

that always happens, for few old pupils go botanical excursions twice, after they find them out—Mr. Barnes and his party agreed. And by an ingenious trick of that gentleman, who shone at sleight of hand generally, when they tossed who should go and get them, the lot fell to the new men.

A very merry meal they made of it: singing songs, telling stories, and proposing toasts innumerable, most of which, however, were unintelligible to Christopher from the professional idiom in which they were given. But he got on pretty well with his new acquaintances: and it was only when the shadows began to increase in length along the road, that he made up his mind to start again. Whereupon, Mr. Barnes would thrust an unopened bottle of pale ale into the cart: and all the others shook hands with him and wished him well: and Dr. Bulb repeated his messages to Dr. Aston: and then Christopher was once more upon the road.

The afternoon was warm and bright. Twinkling vanes of distant churches, embosomed in clumps of trees, dozed in the sun-light: and the wild flowers that clustered on the hedgerows, scarcely moved in the still air. Country sounds too, were alone heard in all directions: noises to which no exact cause could be assigned, but which all spoke of fields, and pure air, and meadow labour. All these things—so trifling in themselves, but exerting such influence on our being—made Christopher's heart more full of calm happiness than it had been for some time: and there was not a bird flashed across his path, or a harebell that trembled at his side, that did not minister to his content, as he regarded it almost as a friend.

At length the evening came on: and the lights, one by one, sparkled in the small shops and cottage windows of the little villages he went through. Anon he came to a great town, the principal street of which was full of passengers, who looked after him more than the Londoners had; so that he was not sorry to get through it, and, passing the turnpike at the end, he again in the open country. He did not meet many people now—chiefly sober inhabitants with their families, or various couples, who might have been courting returning from their work: and men going home from labour, who wished him good night. In a short time the moon rose; and then as he came to a common, across which the rabbits kept darting in and out during their feeding, he thought about making a halt for his first night's bivouac.

Turning from the road, which was on a level with the heath, he found a sort of natural circus, shut in by clumps of tall hawthorns, and here he determined to pitch his tent. He first released the donkey from the shafts, and fastened him to a peg driven into the ground, with a cord that gave a radius of fifteen or twenty feet for feeding. Then he got out the apparatus for his tent which Hickory had fashioned for him. The pliant sticks, pointed at each end were stuck into the ground and made a series of arches, over which he strained the canvass, and then crawling in to inspect it, was quite delighted at the snug look of the little hut. He next removed his bedding from the cart: and carefully packing his other property under the tarpaulin, he backed the

Taglioni against the head of the dormitory. Having arranged all which to his satisfaction, he again crept beneath the canvass, undressed, and went to bed.

He was some time getting to sleep : for the novelty of his position, not unmixed with some slight apprehension of intrusion, was sufficiently exciting to keep his eyes open. But nothing came to disturb him ; nor did any thing break the stillness of the country night, except now and then the heavy tinkling of a sheep bell, the lazy notice from the steeple of some distant church that the night was progressing, or the quiet gurgling of a water-course close at hand, that having turned a mill, was flowing on towards the river.

But as he called up the scenes of former days in his thoughts, the tent reminded him of his journeys with Hickory, and scarcely any time seemed to have passed since he had last slept under one. This led to reflections on his subsequent career, and unavailing attempts to trace some clue to his birth, until they became quite bewildering. And then, and not before, worn out with useless speculations, and the long day's work—for he had been up in the earliest morning with his preparations—he at last fell asleep.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE DEATH OF ROCKEY.

TIME does not interfere much with country towns, nor with their inhabitants. In bringing about the events and changes of the great world, he has so much to do that he overlooks the retired districts ; or if he does pay them a visit, it is rather to repose and keep still, as he listlessly watches his unturned glass, than to keep his sands running in turmoil and fevered hurry.

And so, during the events of the last six or seven years, he had but lightly visited the good old Dr. Aston, who still lived in his red brick scarlatina-looking house with the venerable Grittles, and surrounded by his curiosities. The Parthenon had long since been done up, as regarded its original objects ; but the building had been used successively as a Quaker's meeting, a Methodist chapel, a Magistrate's bench, and an exhibition room for any wandering professor who came near the town ; and had been finally taken as a store-room by a wine and spirit merchant—a rising young tradesman who had once been the ill-regulated Mr. Saunders of the committee, and who now declared that his liquors were the only things good that ever came out of it.

The only change in Dr. Aston's establishment was that he had started an assistant, to take some of the heaviest work off his hands ; and between this gentleman and Mrs. Grittles a constant war was kept up, for she could not bring herself to put up with the presence of an

intruder. Yet, Mr. Mole—that was his name—was the most inoffensive person in the world. The very moths and butterflies that the Doctor bred up and hatched all over the house, did not appear afraid of him, but settled with impunity on his head, or laid their rows of eggs upon his coat-collar as he stood dispensing; and when Sput, the Doctor's favourite cat, chose to fall asleep on his cloak, he would go out in the wet without it, sooner than disturb her. His whole heart and soul too were in his profession; he would have lived upon all the newly invented chemicals and galenicals if they would not have disagreed with him, to study their effects himself; and his hours of relaxation were passed in taking pill-boxes out of one another, putting up half-dozens of pink fever-powders, washing phials with shot and soap-suds, and other light recreations. But with all this, Mrs. Grittles could not bear him; his unfortunate predilection for the Doctor's favourite pursuits increased the old lady's dislike; and, as she was wont to say, "She wouldn't have him to attend a pig of hers"—she laid great stress on "pig"—"No, not if he was to go down on his bended knees, and beg and pray to do it."

"Mrs. Grittles," said Mr. Mole to the housekeeper one afternoon, as he came in; "what has become of those stones which your master sent home in a hamper?"

"What's become on 'em?" replied the dame. "What should? I shot 'em all out in the garden to pave the wash'us."

"Oh, you shouldn't have done that," cried Mr. Mole; "they were petrifications."

And he bolted out to recover the insulted treasures.

"Pretty fictions, indeed!" grumbled Mrs. Grittles, "I never see such a lot of old stocks and blocks as they bought. The boys would get a wheelbarrow full in five minutes in the road, for a ha'penny. Ah! it's no use talking; they must go on their own way."

And before the good woman had stopped her complaining, Mr. Mole returned with his preserved specimens.

"They are from the excavations of the railway," said Mr. Mole. "You would not think, Mrs. Grittles that that had ever been a fish—now would you?" he asked, as he took up a specimen of the *cornua ammonis*.

"Fish, indeed! not I," said Mrs. Grittles, scarcely deigning to look at it. "It's more like a firework."

"And these are shark's teeth," he continued.

"I've lived here maid and wife and widow near seventy year," said the old woman shaking her head mistrustfully, "and I know there never was a fish found all round the place: they said the salt killed them. Besides the railroad, or whatever it is, comes through a hill. How can fish be on a hill? Yah!"

The mention of railroads had added considerably to her indignation as she turned away. Not that the feeling of anger arose from any lingering affection for the "good old coaching times," as they are called; for as yet the objects of the cuttings and embankments that crossed the country were imperfectly understood by Mrs. Grittles. She heard that a steam-engine was to have something to do with it, and

as the only use to which she had seen steam-engines applied was to let people down the shafts of deep mines and pull them up again, she had formed some vague notion that such was to be the future method of transport from one place to another. Even this, however, did not much disturb her, for her travelling days had long been over; indeed, she had never gone ten miles from the town in her life. But the formation of the line had brought a set of strange and savage men into the neighbourhood—ogres who swallowed more beef and beer than an average family could have consumed in the same time; who did not respect the natives; who constantly took Dr. Aston's surgery for a public-house from the light which burnt until a late hour in the evening; and called him up three or four times every week when any one of their body had half murdered another in a beer-house fight.

"What's the matter, Grittles? what's the matter?" asked Dr. Aston, as he came in just in time to hear the old lady's last expression of disbelief in the value or reality of the fossils.

"Nothing, Master Robert, nothing," observed the old lady, "only Mr. Mole says that's a fish, and has brought all these old stones up again from the yard."

"Quartz, evidently," said Dr. Aston, as without paying much attention to Mrs. Grittles, he took up a fractured pebble from the heap.

"Quartz! pecks of bushels more like," exclaimed Mrs. Grittles. "This was the only pretty thing amongst 'em," and she drew a shell from her pocket, "and that was in a lump of chalk that took half an hour to scrape and wash away."

"What, was that in chalk!" cried the Doctor; "and you have cut it all away! Oh, Grittles! you have ruined it."

"Not a bit—not a bit," returned the old lady; "there isn't a scratch. There, let it bide on the mantel-shelf; it's prettier than all them 'winkles.'"

This was in allusion to a conglomeration of small shells, which was on the mantelpiece. Pushing it on one side, the housekeeper put her treasure in its place, and went to look after the tea and scold the girl who assisted her in the household work: and whom Mrs. Grittles was constantly accusing of looking after the 'chaps' and 'fellers'—those vague objects of reproach to housemaids, always seized on by old ladies.

"Mrs. Pearce is better to-day, Sir," observed Mr. Mole, looking at a list of patients. "It was only a fright."

"Let me see," said the Doctor: "the wind blew the cowl down the chimney into her room—did it not?"

"Yes, sir: and all her fear was that the baby would be born with a tin head that turned round, and a pointer dog on the top of it. But she's quite pacified now."

"Well; that's a comfort," said Dr. Aston. "Hush! what's the bell tolling for?"

"Not one of ours," said Mr. Mole: "Kidge's I think." (Mr. Kidge was the opposition practitioner). "He's killed Stevens' child at last, and they are going to bury it: I saw the coffin in Mr. Tack's window

last night. It's all blue and silver: so handsome that it's to be wrapped up in brown paper when it's buried."

"Anything new at the Union House to-day, Mr. Mole?"

"Nothing, Sir, but a tipsy tramp who broke the windows. I had his hair cut short, gave him some pills, and put him in a warm bath; and that frightened him so, that he ran away an hour afterwards, quite sober."

The Doctor wrote his directions in the day-book; the medicines were made up: and then he sat down to tea with Mr. Mole, at which meal they usually sought relaxation in pinning out butterflies, polishing pebbles, and such light work. And unless their services were again required, this lasted until supper. But, on this evening, soon after the candles were lighted, there was a bustle in the quiet street before the Doctor's house, unwonted at such an hour. A rude cart was driven up to the door, followed by some boys and workmen, and the surgery bell was rung somewhat hurriedly.

"Here's an accident, Sir," said Mr. Mole, as he answered the bell, and returned. "They say a man's hurt on the railway at the cutting; and want you to come directly. They've sent a cart for you."

Dr. Aston went to the messenger: but finding from the locality that he could get to it across the fields upon foot, much sooner than by going round the road, he dismissed the man, and telling Mr. Mole to look out his case of instruments and bring it with him, prepared to start.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Grittles, as she gave him his lantern: "more of your instution scrapes. There'd never have been steam if it hadn't been for the littery lecturers."

The Doctor could not help smiling at his housekeeper's rooted aversion to science, as he took the light and set off with Mr. Mole across the field contiguous to the town.

It was a dark night in the country: and when they got near the spot where the accident had occurred, it was as much as the Doctor could do to make out the way, for the railway in progress had entirely altered the face of the country. All the old landmarks—the trees, and rails, and gates had been swept away: hills of loose earth, in which carriage wheels sank inches deep, rose where all had been a plain but a few months before: and entire headlands had disappeared, or formed the portals of yawning subterranean caverns, piercing the strata that had reposed above each other since the deluge, from which the fossil bones and shells belonging to the monsters of former oceans were once more brought to light, and the gaze of human eyes fell on them, possibly for the first time.

"Down here, Sir: this is the way; mind how you come," said a man, who appeared to have been looking out for them and held up some burning fir-cones, which blazed and sputtered at the end of a branch, to light them.

They crossed a bank of earth, and then saw the intended line in a deep cutting, far below them; its direction marked by the glare of the coal fires, which were burning for the men to work by almost as far as

the eye could reach, and throwing their gigantic shadows upon the walls of the mighty trench. The men were shouting to each other constantly: and this noise, coupled with the roaring of the masses of gravel that occasionally fell in, the clattering of the trams constantly passing on the rails now loosely laid down, and the rattling of the horses' harness, had a demoniacal effect, the more so that merely the outlines of the navigators in their rude dresses—and some with scarcely any at all—could be made out.

Dr. Aston and his assistant followed their guide with some difficulty down the slope of the cutting, and then went along the rails to a small hovel, built at the side, of turf and boards, in which Rockey was lying; in fact, he had lived, or rather slept in it, during the time he had been working there. Some of the labourers were standing round; and they had brought one of the fire-cages to the door, which alone lighted the interior; beyond the comparatively feeble rays from the Doctor's lantern. As he came up they drew away and allowed him to enter.

The man was on the floor, kept there by the efforts of four of his comrades, beneath whose united grasp he was kicking and plunging to be released, swearing at the same time frightfully. There was a terrible gash across his temple, from which the blood had been flowing down his face, and his left hand was almost crushed. But in spite of this, his strength was marvellous, as he heaved up, every half-minute, notwithstanding all the power that bore against him; and as Dr. Aston came in he fixed his glaring eyes upon him, but evidently without any consciousness.

"Wut!" he shouted in his convulsions. "Wut! Smiler! Hold hard! or I'll cut the liver out of you. Let him have his head; d—your stupid eyes, let him go! Hi!"

And he again poured out a string of oaths.

"Is he in liquor?" asked the Doctor.

"Well—you see we don't know, sir," replied one of the men. "He'd been a drinking with some of the navvies at the beer-shop before he went off with the trams; and when he got to the inclined plane they forgot to put the breaks on."

"Then he was run over."

"No—not exactly. The trams came upon the horse's legs and frightened him, and he knocked Rockey down. His pardner there knows about it, but he's rayther gone."

He pointed to a fellow who was leaning against the wall gazing heavily at the scene, and evidently intoxicated.

"Well, what do you know about this, my man," asked Dr. Aston.

"It's all right," answered the fellow in thickened imperfect accents; it's all as right as a trivut. Who says it ain't?"

"Oh—I don't, I'm sure," answered the Doctor, somewhat alarmed at the fierce manner in which the 'navvy' asked the last question.

"You're a gen'leman," continued the man, "Dr. Aston—you know me, and I've know'd you long, and what I says is that a man's a man and who says he isn't? Ooray! Three cheers for Dr. Aston Three—cheers—for—"



The Discovery of the "Muck"

And whilst he was speaking he settled down quietly upon the ground, and appeared to go off into a stertorous sleep immediately. The Doctor seeing there was no information to be got from that quarter, turned to the sufferer.

"Now stand aside, my good men," he said. "A little more light and a little air. Take his neckcloth off."

One of the men untied the steaming crimson rag that was round his throat, and threw it on the ground.

"Mind Bill," said another: "perhaps there's money in it. Now, only one of you look, and then we shall know who's got it, if there is. Suppose the Doctor takes it."

Dr. Aston undid the folds, and a small parcel fell from them. After untwisting several envelopes of paper, he turned out a small diamond buckle, of antique form.

"Precious stones," observed one of the men. "Lor! who'd a thought of Rockey having they about him."

The Doctor placed the ornament in his pocket and turned to the wounded man; who was again struggling furiously, until every muscle appeared contracted into an iron cord.

"This is more than drunkenness," he said: "it is delirium. Stop: do not hold him so tight: he is getting quieter."

The men relaxed their grasp; and the sufferer ceased swearing at the same minute, as a heavy stifling breathing, more like a snore, took the place of his imprecations.

"That was just like he was when we brought him in first," said one of the men, "until Bill Howard got the gin down his throat."

"Why, you didn't do that, surely?" remarked the Doctor.

"We'd got nothink else," answered the man.

"And how much did you give him?"

"Oh—not a pint; because there's the bottle; and I'd had a sup from it; and some was spilt. But we revived him at once."

"Too much—didn't us Bill?"

"I never see such a one to kick as he was," replied the other. "Look out: he's off again."

"We must get him away from here before we can do anything," said the Doctor. "Have you a hurdle, or a shutter, or the tail-board of a cart, or anything you can carry him on?"

But whilst he was yet speaking, the wounded man, with extraordinary force, heaved up his body, almost in an arch—his head and feet alone resting on the ground, again entirely overcoming the power of the others to keep him down. His eyes glared at the bystanders until they appeared to be starting from his head: and with open mouth and protruding tongue he seemed about to break out into another volley of delirious blasphemy, when suddenly every muscle relaxed; a deep expiration, like that of a person who has held his breath for a long time, followed; and he lay still upon the ground.

"He is gone," said Dr. Aston, lifting up the hand, which, when he had felt for the pulse, fell passively back again. "Now, you cannot

leave the body here," he added after a short pause. "What will you do with it?"

The men made no reply: for they laboured under the impression, common amongst the lower orders, that no dead body can be removed from the spot on which the breath left it, until after the coroner's inquest. But the Doctor contrived to explain this away: and then the others, by his directions, carried the corpse from the hut and placed it on one of the trams, lighting another branch of the fir cones, which they stuck in front of it.

They had nothing to throw over the body, and as the light danced and quivered over the distorted features, it gave them the appearance of motion. The men took their place at the side of the tram, Dr. Aston and his assistant following; and in this manner the ghastly procession moved on along the line towards a public-house about half a mile away, in a shed of which the remains were to be left to await the inquest. The owner demurred somewhat at taking it in; and it was not until the Doctor had suggested the twelve glasses of brandy-and-water that the jury would require, and the social evening in which the proceedings would most probably terminate, that he consented to open his doors.

"I will take care of this buckle," said Dr. Aston. "It is a curious coincidence; the last time I saw that man, several years ago now, he was attending a poor fellow who had been crushed in the great mine. I could not recollect his face until just this minute. Diamonds too, I really think," he continued, looking at the brooch as he breathed on it, and rubbed it upon his coat. "I wonder how he came by it: not fairly, I'm afraid."

Having seen the body deposited, he gave the men who had assisted in conveying it an order for some beer, and then returned home with Mr. Mole, where Mrs. Grittles had not been put into a very good temper by the numbers of people who had come to inquire about the accident; to all of whom she replied, "she didn't know what it was exactly, but it was something very dreadful, and all owing to steam and the littery institutions."

CHAPTER XLVII.

CHRISTOPHER MEETS WITH A PROFESSOR WHO TAKES AN INTEREST IN HIS LECTURE.

ONCE asleep, Christopher enjoyed a good night's repose: so sound and long, that when he next awoke, the sun was shining through the canvass of his tent. It had been raining, too, in the night; for part of his arched roof was yet damp, but none had penetrated; so that he saw, to his great comfort, that it was waterproof.

His first business was to turn out of his abode, and take a plunge in the rivulet that ran close to the green plot upon which he had

pitched the tent ; and then he dressed and turned his attention to Marlyman, who had cropped a ring of grass, like a circus, as perfectly round as the extreme length of his cord enabled him to describe. Christopher shifted his position ; and then looked after his breakfast. He had stowed away some bread and meat inside his saucepan the day before ; and the bottle of pale ale which Mr. Barnes had insisted upon his taking with him, formed a capital adjunct to his fare, so that he was about to begin the first morning rather sumptuously than otherwise.

The country is the only place in which you can enjoy that pleasant calm which follows an early cold bath ; when, comfortably convulsed with the glow of reaction—the same kind of happy shuddering that a warmed bed induces—you can listlessly stretch yourself out on the sunny turf, and, for the time, forget that there are such things as annoyances, or ill feelings in the world, to bother you or anybody. You get this feeling nowhere else—a sensation of ease and comfort is banished by that frightfully uncertain journey, inseparable from the rickety bathing-machine, which alone equals a stage-carriage—we mean a carriage used on the stage—in the eccentric revolution of its wheels. And in a London bath, where you must stand on a wet grating, and make your toilet in a cupboard, your attention is only directed to getting dried as fast as you can, by the agency of the sheets of folded pasteboard which the proprietors conceive to be towels ; and with the assistance of the small looking-glass, whose reflective powers the constant damp has so seriously affected in both cases. Even in the best appointed warm bath, the perilous feat of getting in, is only exceeded by your slippery feet in getting out ; and your only feeling upon again coming into the air, is one of misgiving as to whether you ought not rather to be between blankets. So that, we repeat, a country plunge and its results, can alone be classed as a luxury in bathing.

Christopher was in this pleasant mood, just about to discover some way of drawing the cork of the ale without a corkscrew, when he perceived some one coming towards him from the road. His first thoughts were, that he had been trespassing, and that this was a person sent to drive him away ; but a further glance re-assured him on this point.

The stranger was a man about five-and-forty, of spare body and attenuated legs, over which his rusty black trowsers—deeply jet, however, in some parts from the recent use of the deceptive reviver, and shiny to an opposite degree in others from long attrition—were kept so tightly down by straps, that it was a question whether he could have stooped to have picked up any object without something giving way somewhere. His hat looked as if the nap had been brushed with a pocket-handkerchief after a heavy rain, and never disturbed again ; and round it wore a hat-band, evidently put on by an amateur, fitting as loosely as a napkin round a Stilton cheese. His coat was buttoned closely up to his throat, which was encompassed by a shining leather stock ; and no man would have betted, with feelings of security, as

to the existence of a shirt, although an enormous collar reached up to his ears. He had on but one glove; and in the other hand he carried a stick. His face was somewhat red, though thin, and he wore a wig. As he came near Christopher he took off his hat, made a studied bow; and bade him good morning.

"A traveller, Sir, like myself, I perceive," he said, as Christopher returned the salute. "A citizen of the world, free to come and go as the wind. I respect you, Sir."

Not knowing precisely upon what tack to go in his reply, Christopher remained silent for a minute or two, as the other resumed:

"I think, Sir, we have been neighbours."

Christopher tried to find some trace by which he could recognize his new acquaintance, but failed. So he simply replied:

"Indeed—whereabouts? in London?"

"No, Sir," said the other, "excuse me. I mean here. I was quartered near your establishment last night. This is a favourite encampment with travellers. *Ecce signum!*"

As he spoke he pointed to one or two black spots of charred turf, on which fires had evidently been lighted.

"Will you have some beer?" asked Christopher, still puzzled what to say, as he took up the bottle. "I have only a tea-cup to drink it from, and I want a corkscrew; but we will knock the neck off with a stone."

"Stop, Sir," said the stranger. "Excuse me—this is the way to do it."

He took the bottle, and wrapping a handkerchief round the bottle, commenced knocking it against the stem of a tree; and sure enough, in a minute or two, the cork flew out.

"I passed the night," he continued, as Christopher poured out the ale, "with an old acquaintance, who has stopped on the other side of the road in the warren—a mechanic, Sir—a mere mechanic who deals in mats and turnery, but an honest man. His conversation, however, wore me; for his ideas are limited. I may, perhaps, be permitted to breakfast with you."

"Oh, certainly!" said Christopher, for the man was so exceedingly polite and humble that he could not refuse him; "certainly—but—"

"I see, Sir," interrupted the other. "I know what you mean; but I do not intend to draw upon your store. Here is my meal."

And he drew a roll from his pocket, in the centre of which he had excavated a tunnel for a saveloy. In addition to this he also produced a hard egg.

"You are travelling like myself, I suppose," said Christopher, as they both seated themselves upon the ground, and set out their humble provision. "May I ask what you are?"

"I am a Professor, Sir, of Natural Philosophy," replied the stranger. "Swaby, Sir, is my name, of which you have possibly heard. But the profession is not what it was. I could not live on natural philosophy alone."

"Do you lecture then?" asked Christopher.

"Do I lecture?" returned the other almost in a tone of reproach for Christopher's ignorance. "My dear Sir—the Mayor of Hempfield bespoke my Combustion and brought three pounds himself. A fortunate night that would have been, if I had not burnt the curtains of the Assembly Room at the George Inn, in my last experiment on dangerous compounds. I have not given that subject since."

"You have others then," asked Christopher.

"A dozen: but my Natural Magic is the best phase to observe—you see I know a little about it." And he felt in his pocket. "So; I place that cork ball there. I put it in my hand, and swallow it. Presto! it is gone: and I produce it from my ear."

"Why; that's conjuring," observed Christopher.

"Necromancy, my dear Sir—the hanky-panky of the ancients. I was the first man who burnt the queen of spades; and made the pancake in the hat." And again fumbling in his pocket he brought out a dirty cornerless pack of cards. "You see—oblige me by taking one. Do not let me see it: return it to the pack. Harum-scarum-catafelto—paddy-whack-bang! That is your card I think."

"No," said Christopher: "it was the —"

"Hush!" interrupted his Friend, "do not tell me. Pass! Look at it again. Am I right? Yes: thank you."

And upon this he took some more ale.

Christopher now got a chance of putting in a word; and followed it up by telling him, what his own plans were, asking him at the same time whether he could not give him advice.

"Certainly, Sir: certainly," he said. "And I would begin by recommending you always to get a room for nothing if you can—an infant school, or Sessions House, by permission of the Corporation. In the first place, it is a gain: and, in the second, it prevents the landlord from distraining on your apparatus. My dancing half-crowns and magic tea-caddy are at present in pawn."

"That is somewhat humiliating," said Christopher smiling, "for a man who can make money travel to wherever he likes except his own pocket."

"It is, Sir: as for lack of my tricks I have been obliged to fall back on my Oratory, and my Animal Mechanics: the first I carry in my head—the last in my pocket: and with a bit of pipeclay and a black board I am set up. Look here."

He took a piece of chalk in his hand, and sketched a diagram on the tail-board of the Taglioni.

"A skull," he went on; "and—the Dome of St. Paul's. Observe the analogy: both are strengthened at the points from which the arches spring—the skull by the temples, and the dome of Paul's by a chain. If a man falls on the top of his head, it is at the temples that the fracture takes place: when the dome of St. Paul's gives way it will be at the base. How perfect the analogy!"

And before Christopher had recovered his surprise, Mr. Swaby had rubbed away the diagram, and broken out in another place about the solar system.

"It's wonderful how the old gag takes," he said: "about the world, and the masts of the ship, and the spectator. But did you ever reason upon it, Sir. If you did, you would see that no known ocean could float a vessel of such proportions: and the gentleman with the stick, who is out for a walk looking at it, could go from Great Britain to Jericho in two strides. But it does: because it's old and well-known. Take my advice and stick to old things. People don't want to learn the new ones. It confuses them and puts them out of conceit with themselves. Ah! it's a curious world!"

"It is indeed," replied Christopher, looking at the Professor, as his sigh was drowned in another draught of ale.

They went on with their meal: and in the course of it Mr. Swaby found out the town to which our hero was first about to bend his steps. Most singularly, it was in the very direction the Professor was about to take, and he should be charmed if he might be permitted to accompany him. Christopher would perhaps rather have gone on his way alone: but the other appeared a harmless amusing fellow, from whom it was possible he might gain some information, so he acquiesced. And when their breakfast was over, as there was very little to clear away and wash up, the Professor assisted him in collecting and packing up the things that formed the tent, and then they both started on the road together.

They had some five-and-twenty miles to go, according to the posts, so they took their time. Mr. Swaby's knowledge appeared unbounded: and, in the next turn his varied conversation took, Christopher thought that he might have been a useful adjunct to the botanical party of the day before.

"The *Ranunculus Bulbosus*," he said, as he plucked a flower, "or Common Buttercup. There is another flower like it, but the reflected calyx shows the difference. It is a superstition to suppose that the tint which it radiates to the chin, when held near, determines the object's love of butter; or indeed that butter exists in the petals."

And the next moment he was telling Christopher that when they got to the town, he would show him a secret, how to engrave any name, in letters of gold, upon a knife, with only a bit of yellow soap and some blue vitriol; and turn a halfpenny into a halfcrown by common chalk and quicksilver.

There was however an idiosyncrasy in Mr. Swaby's constitution—that he was always thirsty. They scarcely passed a public-house where he did not halt for his half-pint: and this constant drought he attributed to remarkable causes, physiologically considered, such as the wind being in the north, suffering from corns, wearing a tight hat, and having eaten a saveloy for breakfast. And after the first three or four draughts, he borrowed minute sums of copper from Christopher, to be repaid at the town, where he expected his luggage when they arrived at their inn. "For," as he observed: and Christopher also thought proper: "going to lecture, it will not do to be seen sleeping in a tent."

It was evening when they came near the town: and as there were no advantageous spots to pitch the tent on, together with various notices

conveying uncomfortable information to all wandering tribes generally, fixed on different sign-posts, and especially over the stocks, at the entrance of the town, Christopher determined to go to an inn, and the Professor directly recommended one.

"Humble, Sir," he said: "but cheap. Genius, however, can gild a barn."

Christopher thought such an undertaking would be somewhat unprofitable—not more so perhaps than the flights of genius generally: but he had no objection to a cheap abode, so he stopped his caravan at last, at a small hostelry, and there settled for the night, the Professor apparently obtaining his bed for nothing on the strength of having recommended a customer: and procuring the means for his board, by performing a few delusions with cards in the tap-room.

The following morning, he put on his best attire, and was up and about early. He found there was a club-room attached to the principal inn, which was occasionally let out for exhibitions; and by depositing the sum beforehand, he was enabled to engage it for the next evening: after which he went to a printer, and got his bills worked off: having several thousand additional ones printed, with the locality left blank, which, on the recommendation of the Professor, might be filled in, as occasion required. And then he distributed these about the town, asking the shopkeepers with great politeness to put them in the windows: and made a very respectful call upon the parson to solicit his patronage: so that these things altogether filled up that day. All the following one was taken up in arranging the diagrams, and setting out the chairs and benches in the room: and then with an anxious heart, he awaited the result of his first plunge.

"You must have some trustworthy person to take the money," observed the Professor, "after you begin; because other people will keep coming in. I shall be happy to do it."

Christopher immediately accepted his offer. They returned to the public-house to a very modest meal, and then, a little before the hour appointed for opening the doors, went up to the inn.

There was evidently a little excitement about the matter; for the dirty boys had collected, and were tumbling over one another before the entrance; and the old beadle and beggar-driver had come up to keep order. Christopher looked with pride in at the shop-windows where his bills were displayed; and when he saw a decent-looking man actually stopping to read one, he could have made him a low bow. He went to the room the back way, and lighted up his candles; and was admiring the effect of the colours and gilding, with the Professor, when the adjoining church-clock struck seven, and the doors were opened.

Christopher took his place at a table on the landing, and awaited the company, the Professor remaining in the room to show them to their seats. The lecture was not to commence till eight; and for the first half-hour nobody came, except an impudent boy who ran up-stairs and shouted "Bo!" at Christopher, and then bolted down again; the rude proceeding being evidently followed by a skirmish with the beadle,

which, to judge by the subsequent cheers, appeared to terminate in favour of the populace. All this time the candles were gallantly burning away, and Christopher was beginning to lose courage, when he heard a carriage stop, and a lady and gentleman, with two or three children came up, and paid for front seats.

"Mr. Maltby, the brewer," whispered the landlord, who followed them up: "great man. You'll have the Spikers now."

And so it proved, ten minutes afterwards. Christopher subsequently found out that the Spikers always did what the Maltbys did, and went everywhere they went, from a church to a circus, or from a Bible-meeting to a ball. The Spikers have connexions in every country place all over England.

The room kept filling gradually: the company arriving faster as eight o'clock approached, until just as it was striking, the clergyman came in, and was ushered into an arm-chair kept on purpose for him. And when he was settled, Christopher went in and began his lecture, leaving the Professor at the door.

He was not applauded on entering, for the people did not know him, and they were besides not much used to hear lectures, so that the commencement was rather flat. But all this time, he saw additional shillings walking into the back seats as the shops were closed, which rather consoled him: and, in a little while, the audience warmed with the subject, especially laughing at the Quintain and heartily applauding a panegyric upon Dr. Parr dancing round the may-pole—the children associating him only with Dr. Syntax. Christopher got encreased courage, too, as he proceeded. He could now drink the water without chattering his teeth against the tumbler: he made his points with greater force: and at last concluded amidst general applause. Some of the company on the front seats came to talk to him; and tell him how much they had been amused: and the juvenile Maltbys, (who were considered to belong to that pleasant race of children known as sharp little things,) asked puzzling questions connected with the diagrams, which Christopher tried to answer, but never could satisfactorily enough to stop further inquiry. And lastly the clergyman told him, that if he would call to-morrow he might have a note to a family in the next town who could help him: so that everything looked bright and prosperous.

But a drawback to Christopher's success was in waiting. Up to the departure of the last of the audience the Professor had not made his appearance: and when the room was quite empty, Christopher went out to look for him. But he was not on the staircase. One of the waiters, who had listened to the lecture through the door, said that Mr. Swaby had left his post about twenty minutes after it commenced: after which one or two persons had come in for nothing.

This was rather odd; but perhaps the poor Professor had been taken ill, from other effects that his corns might have had upon his constitution. So Christopher went back to the room, and having packed up all his diagrams and candle-ends, returned to the public-house. But to his astonishment, the Professor was not to be found

there either. He waited until past midnight, but he did not return; and then the fearful truth became apparent. Mr. Swaby had given another proof of his genius by walking off with the five-and-twenty or thirty shillings of the latest portion of the audience: and whilst Christopher had been talking about the jugglers of the dark ages, had given a practical example of what they could do in the more enlightened times of the present.

This was a blow for poor Christopher at the outset. But when he retired to his room, and counted out the money he had taken, he found, after discharging all expenses, he was between two and three pounds in pocket; and this, if it lasted, would bring him in a little fortune by the end of the year. So he went gladly to bed, his only restlessness arising from useless speculations as to the route by which the Professor had evaporated; and self-upbraidings for having placed such trust in a stranger—and that stranger a wandering man of genius!

However, he resolved to be more cautious in future; and not so readily make any acquaintances with those whom the chances of the road led him to associate with.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

GUDGE AND LADY ARDEN.

IN one of the southern counties of England—some forty miles away from London—and situated upon a green headland, where the rich pastures of the valley of a fair river make their first undulating break, before they merge into the short verdure of the downs—whose summits may be seen and taken as land-marks from the sea—there is an old Elizabethan house.

It is built of grey stone, from a quarry which has not been worked for many years, but which may be still seen in one of the shows upon the estate, if you have courage to penetrate the dense thicket of brambles, saplings and fern that encompass it. It was once a splendid mansion; but at the period of our tale, it was little cared for. The ivy that climbed along its many-gabled front, had, in some places, forced the discoloured glass from its frame, and twisted round the mullions to grow inside the rooms; large trees had upheaved the masonry of the terrace-wall in like manner, throwing it, by the force of their roots, in huge blocks upon the turf; and sturdy creepers, reddening in the autumn, had mounted to the very summits of the clustered chimneys—from some few of which the smoke curled as of yore—and grown over their tops.

There had once been herds of deer in the fine park that surrounded the house; but they had been sold, or stolen, or had strayed away; for the palings around were broken down, and their absence had been poorly remedied, here and there by hurdles, and old gates intertwined

with furze. And one or two stately chestnut trees marked the course of a noble avenue that had once led up to the principal door of the house, the smooth stumps of the others still forming weather-beaten platforms amongst the grass. There were large gardens too, enclosed with high walls, but nothing was cared for within. They were perfect wildernesses; and the walks were choked up—below with grass and self-sown vegetables, and above by the long sprangs of the vines and shoots of the standard fruit trees, which no hand trained or trimmed into order. And the pleasure behind the house was equally uncared for. Suckers from the large trees surrounding it, grew up all about the lawn; and the hop and wild convolvulus, having once got an occupancy, overran the entire enclosure, and strangled all the other flowers that tried to lift their heads above the weeds.

This old house was not less desolate within. Every thing was falling to decay from want of care and occupancy. The wind roared and howled down the huge chimneys, and wailed strangely through the ill-fitting doors, even when all was tranquil without. The rude flooring, patched and repaired with half-a-dozen different kinds of wood, creaked and groaned beneath the lightest footfall; and odd unexplained noises sounded from the dry wainscot constantly. There were, besides, closets and cupboards in every available corner, some of which appeared, from their obscurity, to be perfectly unfathomable; and others sounded hollowly, when knocked, proving that there were still recesses beyond them which had never been opened. There were long ghastly lofts, in addition, immediately under the patched and heavily mortared roofing, dimly lighted through the dull green-glass casements at either end; and staircases in all directions, communicating with so many different damp rooms and leading to so many different mouldy passages and landings, that but for the dread of meeting the real ghosts, any sham apparition might have played whatever pranks he pleased, and got away as easily after them, as though he had possessed the power of pervading oak boards as glibly as his spiritual prototypes.

One apartment only of this house was fitted up with regard to female occupation: and that was a parlour with a bay window, which commanded a fine sweep of level woodland, dotted with villages and clumps of foliage, amidst which, here and there, a church spire rose; and bounded by a chain of blue hills on the horizon. In this room, one afternoon towards the close of autumn, there were two persons. One of them was a lady, about forty years of age in reality, although she looked older, for her features were worn and lined, and the general expression of her face indicated anxious thought. She was sitting at a table, on which was placed a box: and from this had been taken the quantity of legal papers by which it was surrounded. At the window was seated her companion—a man under the middle stature, who had a small table before him on which was some wine, and on a chair at his side were some filberts, (which he was cracking with his mouth); and some more papers. The lady was the widow of Sir Frederick Arden, and her present associate was Mr. Gudge.

"Another maggot!" observed that gentleman, as he threw the shells past the lady into the fire-place, and put the fat white worm upon the table. "Another faulty bunch, my lady. I shall have a regular Derby of 'em soon. I wish I could prevail on you to take a glass of wine with me."

"Thank you—I never touch it," replied Lady Arden, as with a sigh of weariness she opened a fresh bundle of papers.

"I wish you would," said Mr. Gudge, "it would do you good; depend upon it. So it would to see these maggots racing. There—now I've made a course between these two knives, and it's a fair start. Come; back one, my lady."

Lady Arden shook her head: but could scarcely forbear smiling, at the notion of the attorney that she could take any pleasure in such an excitement.

"Have you any idea, Mr. Gudge," she asked, "when I shall be permitted to do what I please with my own property?"

"Ah! now you ask me a difficult question—a very difficult question, indeed, my dear madam—I beg your pardon—my lady. These things are not in our power to direct you see. All we have to do is to put our trust in those wise laws which secure to us what we have."

"Or keep us from what we certainly have not," resumed Lady Arden. "What has become of all the property that was once my own?"

And she asked this with an earnestness and bitterness of heart that almost ended in tears.

"It is still in existence, my lady," said Mr. Gudge: "but you see every caution was necessary to preserve it. Your noble sacrifices upon marriage, to release the late Sir F. from the embarrassments into which his affairs entangled themselves, complicated your own. We must have patience—patience, my lady. I have always found it the best thing to recommend, in the course of a long, and, I hope, beneficial practice—at least to my clients."

"Has not the patience of seven or eight years been enough to bring about some solution of this intricate business?" asked the lady: "or must I still wait until Frederick comes of age? The house is crumbling with want of care, and yet you say I must do nothing towards its repair."

"Oh—you mistake me," said Mr. Gudge. "You are at liberty, my lady, to do everything you like, through proper authority. But the supplies, at present, offer the chief difficulty to your expenditure."

"I cannot comprehend it," replied Lady Arden: "I appear to be possessed of wealth in every direction: and yet, into such a labyrinth of confused technicalities have our affairs got, that I can see no way, either into or out of them."

"The whole matter, my lady, lies in this nutshell," said Mr. Gudge, cracking another filbert; "a bad one, again, by the way, but that's no matter. You generously free your late esteemed husband from his liabilities: and make over much of your property to him, receiving his

hand and heart in exchange, as well as a title. Very well. The baronetcy, with its entailed property, thus made comfortable—at your expense, I admit, but still you see it keeps all the eggs in one basket, as the saying is—descends to your son, who is not yet of age. In the mean time, the law, in its disinterested guardianship, takes care of the estate. I may say, as the King of France observed upon a similar occasion, I am the Law.”

There was a pause in their conversation for a few minutes, during which time Mr. Gudge continued to crack his nuts until the silence was broken by the barking of dogs, and a whooping noise in the hall, which heralded the approach of young Arden, who came into the room followed by two or three hounds, who directly commenced an attack upon the lawyer, which required all his energy to combat.

“They won’t hurt you, Mr. What’s-your-name—Budge—Goudge—how much? I never can think of it,” began Sir Frederick. “Well mother—there’s something for you.”

And as he spoke he lugged three or four dead rabbits from his pockets: and threw them carelessly upon the table.

“I shot them all,” he continued, “down in the Warren: and I’m going to shoot in a match, at the Arden Arms for a fat hog on Tuesday, against the snobs. I should be sorry if I couldn’t beat them with my eyes shut.”

“He! he!” grinned Gudge. “You’re a good shot then, Sir F.?”

“Good? slightly!” replied the other. “Come out and pitch your hat up, and see where I’ll send it to.”

“Oh—I can’t afford to throw hats about in that way,” said Gudge. “Lawyers are not so well off as all that comes to.”

“Well, I’m sure I can’t afford it. By the way, mother, that’s what I wanted to tell you. I must have three hundred pounds, somehow or another, by Tuesday. I’ve claimed the winner, too, of the Selling Stakes; but that will do by and bye.”

“My dear Frederick!” exclaimed Lady Arden; “what do you mean?”

“Just what I’ve said,—I think I had better pay the money,—for I owe it; unless you like me to go upon my minority.”

“Eh? what’s it all about?” asked Gudge whose every faculty appeared to be suddenly sharpened at the mention of chicanery, “you are really in a scrape about this money?”

“Not a scrape, but there’ll be a row if I don’t do something.”

“My dear Frederick,” said Lady Arden: “what new extravagance is this?”

“All right, mother: nothing you can understand. I will talk to Gudge here about it.”

And as he was speaking, Mr. Gudge gave over cracking his nuts; and looked upon the mother and son as a hungry spider might be supposed to do whilst inextricably entangling two flies in the meshes of his web.

CHAPTER LXIX.

CHRISTOPHER MEETS WITH DR. ASTON.

IN the entertaining autobiography of the celebrated mariner Robinson Crusoe, there is mention made of a circumstance, which has repeatedly struck us as being very singular, to say the least of it : and we are convinced there are but few of its readers who have not thought the same. It is the account of the print of a human foot which Crusoe found in the sand—the solitary impression which met his gaze in one of his rambles upon the level expanse of any quantity you like to conceive of sea shore.

How this single indentation came there always puzzled us. We have seen Bedouin tumblers take a run and a mighty leap ; and, coming down upon one foot, bound up again and fly off another number of yards from that single fulcrum. But had the unknown savage progressed in this singular way, for his own private diversion, as it must have been, some traces of his spring, or fall, would have been also apparent. None were, however, visible ; nor could any known ‘ hop, step, and a jump ’ have compassed such a distance. The print could not have been left, from many others, after the tide ; for that obliterates every thing alike, levelling the holes and heaps which the wooden spades of the children have so industriously made, as smoothly as the wave of time obliterates the griefs or anger of the human heart. So, like many other unexplicable circumstances, we must take the account as we find it, nor enquire too deeply into its probabilities.

But all have not that right to go on unquestioned which the great master of fiction commanded : and if, in following the course of our story, we were suddenly to show its hero, in some remote spot, without giving a few reasons for his appearance there, we might well be called to account. And so, in again finding Christopher in a part of England distant from that in which we last met him, we must briefly show by what means he arrived there.

He got several letters of recommendation from the clergyman of the town at which he first lectured ; and these carried him on, with advantage, through the next. The weather, besides, was still warm enough for his bivouacs : and he seldom stopped at inns except on the nights of his lectures, so that his expenses were very trifling. He had become a capital cook ; and the utensils that Sprouts had given him came into daily use with wonderful effect ; indeed passengers often saw the light of his fire glowing over the heaths at night, from some sheltered nook of holly or hornbeam. Those who were wanderers like himself seldom interfered with him : they would occasionally give him a good night as he passed, but that was all ; leaving him to enjoy his supper undisturbed. And it must be confessed that a rabbit or hare was now and then caught, or a stray partridge came to a violent and untimely end, to form his meal, in direct violation of the game laws ; whilst at times a broiled

trout, cooked to perfection on the embers, with some huge potatoes from the wayside fields, dressed in the same manner, furnished a banquet by no means to be sneered at ; especially when washed down by the ale from his flat stone bottle.

He saved money too : and whenever it amounted to a sum of sufficient value, he found safe means to forward it to Sprouts, who always put it in the Savings' Bank in due form. And so, day after day he travelled on, now and then resting in large towns for a short period ; and always contriving to get letters of introduction to those inhabitants of the next place he came to, who might be of service to him. When bad weather detained him at small roadside inns, he occupied his time in repairing and retouching his diagrams : and as cold weather came, and he could no longer go on with his gipsying mode of life, he, by degrees, added another lecture to his repertory ; and, by talking with the country people, in the long winter evenings, gleaned a store of old facts and traditions to add to his stock, that he could have acquired in no other manner.

His success, at the same time, was not uniform. Sometimes he found other attractions in the town : and, however well the people were disposed to literature and science, yet a conjuror or a menagerie always drew them away. At other places, lectures had become a drug, and the Institutions, after brief flourishes about mental culture and mutual improvement, got into pecuniary difficulties and shut up ; or barely struggled on by the exertions of the young men who jumped over the counters into the committee seats for the sake of a little importance. But with all this, he saw a great deal of life and character ; and every day his experiences increased, and he looked more clearly into the motives and actions of the world about him.

And so time went on. The leaves soon began to rattle down upon his path ; and next the brown skeletons only of the trees bounded the landscape. Then came the snow and the cold, bringing with them long evenings in the glowing chimney-corners of country inns, wherein huge fireplaces still remained for the rustics to assemble round and talk over old stories. And in this manner the days and nights passed away after one another so rapidly, that the crocus shewed its yellow head one morning quite unexpectedly, pushing it through the mould to look about and see if the snowdrops and anemones might venture forth. Next a flush of green came upon the hedges, and the buds on the trees gradually closed up the view through their naked branches ; until the bright spring, in all its hope and beauty, once more spangled the land with its daisies and primroses. All these changes were so rapidly brought about, that when Christopher looked back upon them, it appeared but as yesterday that he had started, although the months had added years of worldly knowledge to his store.

Still he kept on his path ; and had now worked his way, with good effect, through midland England, having visited few places where he felt that his return would not be welcomed. At times he went through bits of country of which some lingering recollection appeared to haunt him. He expected to see certain objects—a mill, a farm-house, or a

copse, at a turn of the road—and when he got there, he usually found them. He could not tell why; but imagined that he must formerly have passed them with Hickory. The remembrance, however, was too faint for him to attach any circumstances to it.

But one fine day, as he approached a town, at which he intended to stop and bait, during the glowing afternoon he passed some works which, the instant he perceived them, arrested his attention, amidst a grove of tall chimneys, kilns, and smoky warehouses and sheds, rising everywhere about him, of more or less recent elevation. There could be no mistake about them: he had come to the salt-mine from which he had escaped before he met with Hickory! Everything was there just the same—the steam burst in jets as of old from the restless, panting engine, and the pumps were still at work in the brine-pits. The salt crunched beneath his feet as formerly; the very stunted and blackened stumps of hedges, choked by the unceasing smoke from the furnaces, marked the rude track; and the same old barges, or some precisely similar, creaked and dozed upon the canal. One difference to be sure there was—where the fields had been, the cutting of a railway now crossed the country; but this was so low, that it could not be perceived until one was on the brink of the slope, except when the steam of its engines puffed up, to all appearance, from the ground.

Christopher's heart beat strangely as he stopped to gaze upon the old scene; and the feelings with which he regarded it were mixed with something akin to apprehension, as his childish fears of Rockey and his fierce cruelty returned with the associations of the locality. But he presently found that no one took heed of him. Some of the miners came and went, and he tried in vain to recognize them: they were evidently new men since he had left. He endeavoured to find out the cottage in which he had formerly lived, but that had gone, and the few trees about it: its site was now occupied by new out-buildings and sheds.

Leaving the spot, he led his little waggon along the road that ran from the works to the town; and at last came to the White Hart, where he committed his turn-out to the care of the ostler, as he inquired if Dr. Aston still resided there as of old.

"Yes," said the man; who took Christopher for a pedlar, and imagined that the Taglioni contained turnery or Irish linen; "that's the house, opposite, next the bank. He's at home too. I see him just go in with a fresh butterfly. Have you got anything in that line to sell?"

Not exactly comprehending him, Christopher inquired what he meant.

"Oh—he buys anything you like to take him that's alive. There was quite a mob of boys with dormice round his door this morning; and where he'll put the bushels of cattypillers they bring him, nobody knows. If it wasn't for Mrs. Grittles, they'd eat him out of house and home; but she's always smashing 'em. And she tells him that they've gone into the earth. Is—s—s—s!"

He began hissing, as he spoke, after the approved manner of ostlers in general, whilst he rubbed down a horse he was in attendance upon, and tickled it in various uncomfortable places with a wisp of straw.

until Christopher was glad to retire from the vicinity of its heels. He then crossed the road, and rang at Dr. Aston's surgery bell.

The summons was answered by Grittles, who first peeped over the blinds, and then hobbled round and opened the door a little way, looking through the aperture, as though she expected every stranger who called would immediately knock her down, stride in over her prostrate form, and pillage the house forthwith.

"Is Dr. Aston at home?" asked Christopher.

"Have you got an order from the relieving officer?" inquired the old lady in turn. For from Christopher's dusty weather-beaten travelling attire, she did not expect he had come any otherwise than *in forma pauperis*.

"No—I have not," replied the other, in ignorance of her meaning.

"Ah! then I don't think he'll see you—leastwise not just yet: he's busy," replied the dame. "What are you?"

"I'm a lecturer," said Christopher, conceiving he might as well say that as anything else, and thinking that it would inspire respect.

But in this he was deceived. The very notion of a lecturer turned Mrs. Grittles's heart round the wrong way within her; as she associated them all with the Doctor's pursuits, knowing in the days of the Parthenon, after every new lecture, a fresh influx of 'guncrackery' inundated the dwelling: and that holes were burnt in the carpet by vitriolic acid, and horrid smells promulgated from the surgery all over the house, and fearful explosions kept up until advanced hours of the night, to such an extent as to impress Mrs. Grittles with the idea that science generally was something invented to fill the earth with dreadful insects and atrocious fireworks.

"Oh—a lectur, are you?" she exclaimed, as Christopher spoke. "We don't want any to-day."

And she made an attempt to shut the door as she replied; treating Christopher as she would have done any travelling merchant who called with unneeded wares.

"Stop—stop, Ma'am," cried Christopher: and he spoke very politely. "I wish to see Dr. Aston, if you please, upon important business."

"Ah—borrowing his squilletons and things—the old story I suppose. But bless you—the lecturs are all over here: and the littery institutions gone away. He can't be of no more use to you than one of those unborn babes in the bottles."

"Grittles!" cried the voice of Dr. Aston from the surgery as he heard the dialogue. "What's all that noise about?"

"It's only a lectur, Master Robert," said the housekeeper; "and I've told him we've had more than we know what to do with."

"Shew him in—shew him in," replied the Doctor, forming some notion of what the good dame meant.

There was no help for it; so Mrs. Grittles, much against her will, ushered Christopher into the surgery.

"Stop a minute, Sir, if you please," said the Doctor, who was at his old avocation of displaying an insect with pins. "I have a most magni-



ficient specimen of the *Sphynx Ligustri* here—the Privet Hawk Moth. This size is very seldom met with.”

“That’s lucky : or I don’t know where my pelisse would be,” grumbled Mrs. Grittles, still clinging to her old superstition.

“Half a minute, Sir,” continued the Doctor, as he pushed another insect towards his visitor, “just look at that in the meantime—the Vesper Crabro.”

“Just as if we hadn’t enough wapses,” exclaimed the old lady, with an expression intimating that at last she quite gave the Doctor up.

“No, my good Grittles—that’s a hornet—not a ‘waps’ as you wrongly call it. There is a nest, Sir, of those in the thatch over one of my poorer patient’s beds. They wish’d to burn it out with brimstone, but I persuaded them not to, and when the winter comes, I shall take it. So, now, Sir, I am at your service.”

The good Doctor rose, and made a bow to Christopher : for he was always exceedingly polite to scientific people, and lecturers especially. And then he said :

“May I beg the favour of your name, Sir?”

“You have quite forgotten me—of course you would do so,” cried Christopher, who had been breathing very quickly, and fidgetting his limbs and features about very restlessly, since he had been introduced to the Doctor. “I am Christopher, Sir—Christopher Tadpole, that ran away from the salt mine ; ever-so-long ago.”

“Eh!—what? bless me,” said the Doctor. “Let me think a minute. To be sure, I remember. It must be some years though. Sit down—sit down. Grown quite a man too.”

Mrs. Grittles would not place a chair for Christopher ; because she thought that would bring about a long conversation. And she knew the long conversations with travelling geniuses always ended in the Doctor’s inviting the stranger to stay at his house during the time of the lecture ; added to which, various people were always asked to meet him when it was over, and much additional trouble was the consequence. But Dr. Aston told him to be seated and went on with the conversation, whilst he finished arranging the wings and antennæ of the moth to his satisfaction, Mrs. Grittles leaving the room in disgust.

“And so, you have found your way here again,” said Dr. Aston. “But I should not have known you—not a trace left of the little boy who used to come for the miners’ medicine. And what are you doing, Christopher?”

“I have been for some time travelling over the country,” replied our hero, “with a lecture on the Ancient Sports and Pastimes of the people of England.”

“And a very good subject—very good indeed,” replied the Doctor. “I tried last year to revive one or two of them in this neighbourhood ; but, somehow or another, it did not turn out so well as I wished. We had a quintain ; but one of the fellows who rode at it, fell off and broke his arm. And then they said it was a plan of mine to get the two guineas which the parish allowed for a fracture.”

"But they could not have thought so, Sir, if they knew you," said Christopher.

"Ah—I can't say; I can't say," replied Dr. Aston. "Mr. Kidge—that's my opposition—means to try for the parish next year, and he is not very particular in what he circulates. Then I got them to put up a maypole to dance round. But, bless you, they had no more notion of dancing than my Grittles. They pulled one another round till they fell; and then they squabbled, and fought all night. Mr. Mole and I were called up three times. But, however, that's all nothing; do you want to lecture here?"

"Just as you think fit, Sir," returned Christopher. "My principal object was to see you; but if there is a good room and a chance of filling it, I should have no objection whilst I stay here."

"Ah!" said the Doctor, with a sigh, "if the Parthenon had been flourishing now, you might have had a chance. But the Institutions, I fear, have had their day. The common people won't imbibe science, I grieve to say: they prefer beer. It's very sad, but it is so. And it's a bad week here just at present: there's a circus on the green, and they'd sooner see the fool throw real somersaults than hear you talk about them."

"It is really of no consequence, Sir," said Christopher. "My chief desire is to have a little talk with you about my early days, for, to my recollection, you know more about them than anybody else. In a word, I am most anxious to find out something connected with my birth. The mystery has haunted me for years; and the thought of meeting with you and gaining a clue to the circumstances, has kept me up through a great many troubles."

"I am sure you shall know as much as I do," said the Doctor; "but that is very little. Stop," he continued, as for a while he put by the moth; "there is a man who is a little more acquainted with your affairs than I am. A lawyer in London; I should know his name if I heard it."

"It is Gudge," cried Christopher.

"That is the man," replied the Doctor. "I remember some years ago, one night, when I was attending the wife of a poor fellow who went about the country in the merry-Andrew line; one Hickory—Hickory something it ought to be; but I don't think he had another name—at least I never heard it."

"I know," said Christopher, eagerly. "Hickory—it is all right. Go on, Sir."

"Well—I saw this Mr. Gudge that night. I don't know what brought him there, for we had never met but once before. He made several allusions to you, and then went away in a hurry. Now I should imagine that he was the person who could give you every information."

"Oh! I know him well enough, Sir—too well," returned the other. "He is a villain; I am convinced of that; and, moreover, that he has some deep stake in keeping the matter involved in obscurity."

Christopher then, at some length, explained to the Doctor the chief events in which Gudge had appeared as an actor in connexion

with his career, from his being taken away at Liverpool, to his last interview at the Police Office after the row with young Arden at Vauxhall. At the conclusion of his narrative, he added :—

“ You said, Sir, that you had met Gudge once before the interview you spoke of. May I ask when that was ? ”

“ It was the night on which you were born,” replied Dr. Aston.

“ Then you know everything,” said Christopher, starting from his seat, and approaching the Doctor, as he seized his hand, to the great discomfiture of his preparation. “ Oh ! pray tell me everything, Sir,” he continued, in rapid, nervous accents ; “ who was my mother ? and what has since become of her ? I am sure you are in possession of all the facts. I implore you to tell me ! ”

“ Softly—softly, my good Christopher,” said the Doctor, as his professional calmness, and mild way of speaking contrasted strongly with Christopher’s excitement. “ With all this, I know little that you give me credit for ; but we will put our heads together and talk it over. I will conceal nothing from you. But here is Grittles with tea. Have a little patience, and then we will talk it over.”

The old housekeeper tottered into the surgery with the tea-things, which she would always persist in carrying ; and, as she set them down roughly on the table, exclaimed :—

“ Drabbit them boys. What do you think, Master Robert, they’ve brought now, for you to buy, but a flutter-mouse. And when I told ’em you didn’t want it they wouldn’t take it away, but threw it into the passage ; and there it’s gone, flapping and scrimmaging up stairs, and a pretty night I shall have of it.”

“ My good Grittles, you should have told me,” exclaimed the Doctor. “ It was a rare species I ordered them to bring—our largest English bat—the *Vespertilio Noctula*.”

“ Knock’d on the head, I should say,” returned Mrs. Grittles, catching a vague notion of the name, “ and when I hit at it with the broom it skreeked just like a Christian. Oh ! I forgot, Mr. Mole’s sent to say he don’t expect to be home all night, and would you send him a book, because he finds it dull in the cottage, and everybody’s drunk but the woman.”

“ Let him have the volume of Shaw’s *Zoology* labelled *Reptilia*,” said the Doctor. “ He imagined, the other day, that the common black snake might not be nursed inside his waistcoat with perfect safety ; and the book will teach him better.”

The old dame took the book with an air of disgust, as if it had been in reality one of the reptiles whose pictures it contained ; and forthwith grumbled her way out of the room, leaving the Doctor and Christopher once more alone. The former then told his visitor, unreservedly, everything he recollected connected with his first appearance in the world, and by the time they had finished their tea, they had made an arrangement to go together to Chester on the morrow, and see if they could in any way follow up the clue which the Doctor had given the end of.

CHAPTER L.

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL DISTURBS SIR FREDERICK ARDEN.

YOUNG Sir Frederick Arden 'shot against the snobs' for the fat hog at the public-house in the village that bore his arms for its sign, according to his intention ; and was allowed to win it. And the feat accomplished, he sat with his late rivals, smoking and drinking, until the grey morning threw its light upon the ostler and general odd man of the hostelry, as he strove to lead the young Baronet to his home, and overcome his determination to stop and shoot at everything he saw abroad at that early hour, from the squirrel that rushed up the fir-tree, or the rabbit that darted across his path, to the red cap of the early labourer, who, hedging and ditching, only permitted that portion of his attire to be visible.

"I think we'd better go on, Sir Frederick," said the man, after his charge had insisted, for the fiftieth time, upon the presence of unknown numbers of birds in contiguous shaws.

"No, I shan't," replied young Arden, leaning back obstinately, as he regarded the man with the vacant stare of intoxication. "No, I shan't: who's master here? Is it you, or me? Tell me that. Is it you, or me? That's all I want to know. Is it you or —"

"Ask pardon, Sir Frederick," said the ostler touching an imaginary rim to his dogskin cap. "Of course you can do as you like here; only I think, perhaps, you would be more comfortable like, at home."

"Who the devil cares what you think," returned Sir Frederick, shaking off the ostler's arm, and eyeing him with great severity. "What right have you to think, eh? No right at all. Look there. There's a charge in my gun already," he continued, as he sent the ramrod down with a jerk that nearly made it jump out again. "And there goes some more shot, and another wad, and more shot, and more felt: and now I should like to see who'd say I'm not master here."

Whilst he was speaking, he had been rapidly charging the gun in a heedless manner, and he now held it at rest. He then went on to the ostler:

"Do you mean to say I couldn't blow that fellow's cap away, without touching a hair of his head?"

"In course, you could, Sir Frederick," said his companion.

"Of course, I could," replied young Arden, gravely correcting the grammar; "and I'll do it: that's more."

"For mercy's sake, Sir Frederick, don't," cried the ostler as he advanced towards the Baronet, in a terrible state of alarm lest he should carry out his intention, and made an attempt to touch the gun.

"Keep back, you fool," answered the Baronet, "and don't order me. I do as I choose here. I'll take your cap off if I like, and give

you a run whilst I can count twenty. Suppose I do. Now be off. One—two—three—”

“Pray—pray, Sir Frederick!” cried the man in extreme terror as the other levelled his gun.

“Cut on, you ass,” said the Baronet, “unless you want your head blown off. I’m sure enough, if you keep steady. Now—off; one—two—three—”

In a spirit of self-preservation the man rushed forward, and knocked up the gun as young Arden drew the trigger. But fortunately no report followed. In his drunken carelessness he had omitted to put on a fresh cap, and the tap of the hammer was all that was heard. A struggle then took place between them: this induced blows; and when one of the early workmen came to the spot, attracted by the noise, he found the young Baronet scuffling with the public-house ostler. The combat exhausted all his strength; and, at last his foot slipping on the damp turf, he fell down, and then refused to stir, or say another word. So that the scene ended in the labourer fetching his barrow and with the other’s help, wheeling Sir Frederick home to Arden Court, in which form he at last arrived at the door, and was given over to the care of the house servants—one of whom had been sitting up for him all night.

It was late in the day when he awoke; and as he tried to clear and collect his confused ideas in his throbbing head, he remembered that he had asked all the company to spend the next evening with him, to celebrate the completion of what he fancied were some great improvements he had made in the house. Lady Arden had been absent from home—upon business in town, which Gudge was complicating as much as possible—and Sir Frederick had taken advantage of her absence to carry out a scheme which he had long dwelt upon. Finding real social pleasures, to his own thinking, only to be found in tavern life, he had dismantled some of the unused upper rooms of their wainscoat, and with the assistance of the village carpenters had turned the entire hall into a species of coffee-room, divided into boxes, with tables running down the centre of each. This he had furnished, from London, in the most approved fashion. Pewter measures, small black cruet-frames, shining hot-water beakers with string round the handles, and tripod lamps for lighting cigars were displayed on the tables; whilst a copy of the week’s county paper lay about to increase the reality.

“Isn’t it first rate?” he enquired with enthusiasm, as he first showed it to his friend Mr. Nick Mawley, the Pluckley Crusher, who was down in the neighbourhood very fortunately at the time, superintending the training of a forthcoming aspirant for the honours of the P. R.

“Stunning!” replied that gentleman with simple emphasis. “You are the gent as can do it, and does; and no mistake, Sir Frederick. Spittoons too: lor! look at them now; capital!”

“I pride myself upon the idea being out-and-out an original one,” continued the Baronet. “It has never been thought of before.”

“Curous that is, too,” observed Mr. Mawley; “specially when the nobs is so fond of doing everything like us.”

"Just so, Nick. We've our drags you know, like stage-coaches; and our wide-awake hats like ploughboys. I've got a tax-cart—deep chocolate picked out with gold—made after the baker's; and I'm not quite sure whether I shan't have a donkey truck."

"What—not like the costermongers! That will be a regular go!" remarked the Crusher quite delighted at the notion.

"And with all this why not have a private tap-room?" asked Sir Frederick. "It's the same thing you know. So here it is; and mind you're with us this evening. There's a lot coming of the right sort."

As respected Mr. Mawley's standard of social excellence, Sir Frederick was right; for the *élite* of the neighbourhood, in his own line, had been collected. The gentleman in training had promised to be of the party, bringing with him a sporting friend who rejoiced in the soubriquet of 'The Fighting Undertaker' and could flatten a quart pot against his forehead. A local dealer in ferrets was also expected, and a veterinary surgeon; and two or three of the young farmers in the neighbourhood, who had given the young Baronet permission to shoot over their land, were invited. In fact it was just that party which, had Tony Lumpkin been present, he would have pronounced the acme of agreeable society.

They all came to their time: and were requested by Sir Frederick to call for what they wanted, just as if they had been at the Arden Arms. What the style of enjoyment was, and what the conversation chiefly ran upon, we need not too closely report. The Baronet had, however, the lion's share of the talk to himself, and told most wonderful stories, which, had he not been the entertainer might well have been doubted; but no one has a right to question the founder of a feast.

"I ran once twelve miles in an hour," observed Sir Frederick; "from Molesey Hurst right up to London, and beat the Guards' Drag coming up from the races by twenty minutes. That wasn't so bad, was it?"

There was an expression of great astonishment and admiration from the company. But the anecdote was evidently so difficult to swallow, that it required a great deal of gin-and-water to wash it down.

"That's nothing though," he continued, "to what I'm going to do. I'm backed to walk a thousand miles in a thousand half hours, and swallow six oysters with moist sugar at the end of each; and the match is to come off within a month. What do you say to that?"

"First rate," remarked the company, generally.

"Talking of oysters too, puts me in mind of diving, and that brings us to swimming. You know Cozens?"

"Not the Putney Dabchick, you don't mean?" observed Mr. Mawley.

"That's the man," said Sir Frederick. "I'm going to swim him with my clothes on, from Henley to Maidenhead, smoking two dozen cigars on the way, and diving through the paddle-holes of all the locks. I can do it, you know."

"My opinion is, what I says, that there's nothing you can't do, Sir Frederick, if you only has a fair chance," replied Mr. Mawley.

"And I'm not to let the cigar go out, in the dive; there's the pull," continued young Arden.

"Well, I can't understand that," said the other.

"Oh! it's easily done enough. Before you dive, you knock the ashes off short, and put the lighted end in your mouth, like this you know. It sounds difficult, but it's nothing."

Hereupon Sir Frederick, lighting a match, blew it out, and put its incandescent end between his teeth, illuminating them from within as he breathed quickly. The company, of course, all knew the old trick; but they all applauded it rapturously.

"That's all," said Sir Frederick. "It's for fifty pounds a side. He's got his backers, all square; and the money's to be ready at the Cock and Badger—at least if you're agreeable, Nick—the week after next."

"Well—I say I hope you may win it," answered Mr. Mawley. "Gentlemen," he continued, addressing the company generally; "what I've got to say is, that if we had a few more like Sir Frederick Arden amongst us, England wouldn't be what it is."

The company cheered.

"The good old times is being fast bowled out," continued the Pluckley Crusher. "The beaks pecks at the P.R. as if it was something improper, and a man mayn't do what he likes with his own fighting-cocks; and this is in a land of liberty, mind yer!"

Expressions of contempt.

"But if—as I said before, and am going to say again, and can't say too often—but if our country nob's would keep up the old style of thing, as Sir Frederick has done, and does, and will do when he comes to all his rights; and what's the use, as I says, of not—that is—I means, as Sir Frederick's a trump card—"

Here Mr. Mawley banged the table with his fist, which was something like a large life-preserver, so vigorously that several glasses of grog danced into the laps of their owners. And the confusion thus created was of great service to the speaker, who was evidently becoming entangled in the thread of his oration.

"Sir Frederick's a trump card," he went on, "and we'll see him through it, whatever it is, when it happens, if anything ever does. And therefore, gents, I beg you'll drink to the health of the young English gentleman Sir Frederick, and may he never be an old 'un."

The guests obeyed with alacrity; and the noise they made in pushing the bottles and jugs about the table drowned the sound of wheels which would otherwise have been heard, coming up to the front of the house. But just as Mr. Mawley was about to propose that they should get upon their legs and give the usual honours with the toast, the court-bell rang loudly, and for a minute checked their enthusiasm. Sir Frederick despatched one of the servants to see who it was had come so late at night—his first thoughts calling up vague visions of Mr. Barnes and convivial friends arriving by a late coach, or any contrivance at all, from a break to a bathing-machine, on which they would have been conveyed. But the mystery was soon solved. The

guests were again thinking of taking up the suggestion of Mr. Mawley, when the old door creaked on its hinges, and to the dismay of all the party, except Sir Frederick himself, Lady Arden, followed by Mr. Gudge, entered the hall.

The lawyer started back as he saw the assembled party, and Lady Arden uttered an exclamation of surprize.

"Good Heavens! Frederick," she exclaimed, "what does all this mean?"

"It's all right, my lady mother," answered the young Baronet. "I did not think you were coming home, and so I had some friends."

"Friends!" observed Mr. Gudge, surveying the party, and looking at them with an expression that intimated his doubts of their advantage in point of social connection.

"Yes—friends, Mr. thing 'em tight," replied Sir Frederick :—"Gudge—Sludge—I can't think of your name: but you're ugly enough to have any one."

Sir Frederick was evidently approaching the state in which he had passed the preceding evening.

"Frederick!" said Lady Arden. "I beg and pray of you—"

"Now let me speak, mother," he interrupted, "for I won't be put down by you or anybody else. I said, Mr. Smudge, that these were my friends: and so they are; and more than you will ever be if you live till you're as old as the hills. And they are friends of yours too, mother. Gentlemen," he continued, addressing his guests: "that's my mother. Give her three cheers."

"Certingly, Sir Frederick," replied Mr. Mawley, as he led the honours, which burst forth, in noisy irregularity from the lips of the party.

"And that's a lawyer," continued Arden, pointing to Mr. Gudge. "He looks like one—don't he? I'm not going to ask you to cheer him; but I'll bet any of you an even pony, that he don't swim to shore on either side, if we pitch him into the canal."

"What do you mean, Sir Frederick Arden?" cried Mr. Gudge, coming forward, "what do you mean? Have a care, Sir; have a care. If you offer the least insult to me, you shall repent it."

Sir Frederick broke a tobacco-pipe in halves, and throwing one piece at Gudge—who hobbled to avoid it and let it break to bits against the wall—put the other end into his mouth and sucked the air through the empty bowl, making a strange noise, in reply to the lawyer's speech. He then went on :—

"What do you have that fellow always crawling about at your heels, for, mother? Let some of my friends here kick him out. Or I'll do it myself—he isn't very formidable. We'll show you such a bit of fun as you havn't seen for many a long day."

Already fatigued with travelling, Lady Arden's face was deadly pale, as she leant against one of the tables for support, completely terrified at the turn the scene appeared to be taking. Her hopeful son continued :—



THE SODA WATER

CHAPTER LI.

THE BALL AT MRS. SADLER'S ESTABLISHMENT, AND ITS RESULTS.

WHILST the fortunes of the various persons in our story had been chequered as we have shewn, the programme of study and amusement at the Establishment for Young Ladies, Bellfield House, Hammer-smith, remained nearly as before.

Some few changes had, however, taken place. Mademoiselle Le Brun, the resident Parisian, had taken to caps, and caps with linings, which entirely precluded the gaze of the curious as to the destination of her ringlets, which all went away one fine morning, and gave place to braids. And these, to be sure, were of the same colour; but the girls remarked that their parting on the forehead was always concealed by a little brooch, or a band of black velvet. She still, however, sang "La Folle," and spoke to her guitar, with fond affection, of the time when she quitted her Normandie, following it up always by the other ballad about going to revisit it, "*quand chaque rêve doit finir*," as the song says; which time, the girls long ago determined, had arrived, and a palpable reality usurped its place.

Mr. Sadler appeared, now and then, amongst the pupils. He was much less of a mystery than before; and had even essayed to be the writing master for a brief season: but an unfortunate attachment to fermented liquors generally, was found to be incompatible with the duties of tuition, and after a few awkward scenes he was deposed, and by degrees vanished into his former vague position.

Mrs. Sadler had altered but little; if anything, she grew more commanding, looking still more like an Astley's Empress in private life; and Miss Grits, the slow English teacher, who kept the keys and checked the laundress, was now Mrs. Pitkin, the wife of the dancing-master, who still came once a week in his little chaise. But the little boy who formerly played the little fiddle, had grown too big for the little seat behind, and so had been discarded, Mr. Pitkin finding it also necessary—for certain small reasons which Mrs. Pitkin multiplied with annual regularity—to contract his expenditure. In consequence of this, he played the little fiddle himself. It had a very long neck, and a very little body; and when in his coat-pocket, the end stuck out like a wooden note of interrogation asking what it was going to play next. Mr. Pitkin was, however, well to do in the world—the star of the Polka having just peeped forth from the lands to the east of us; and he had a great deal to do in teaching it. For it was that early time when the intricate steps which complicated the lessons of the first Polkists, were in vogue; before the pleasant, confidential, simple figure—which Almack permits, and snobs call 'improper,'—had superseded the other vagaries.

The show-teacher, who used to receive the parents and guardians, and those who wished to find comfortable homes for their charges, had

started a rival establishment; and in the papers the advertisements of Chiswick Grange, always followed those of Bellfield House, Hammersmith. And more than ever, the young ladies of the latter school were made to take walks to Turnham Green, that they might pass the windows of the former on their return.

The pupils under Mrs. Saddler's care were not altogether the same. Louisa Herbert had married a little captain she had met at a Woolwich ball, after a week's engagement; and had now gone off to some distant station with her husband, to experience all the joys of an officer's wife—which, being a state usually associated before marriage with uniforms, and bands, and sunny promenades, and Richmond or Ealing *déjeuners*, is apt, after a time, to disenchant those who try it, rather more plainly than is agreeable. Kate Clifford was, however, still at school, and Laura Maurice, but they were both on the point of leaving; and Fanny Hamper, still kept there by her mother, was now a parlour-boarder. She had learnt everything the establishment could teach her, and knew a great deal more besides. And she was really no longer altogether a girl; at least, such a girl as might still be looked for at a school. But Mrs. Hamper's propensities for throwing herself upon the hospitality of her friends were still reigning, and Fanny somewhat interfered with these. So she still said that her daughter was the age which had been ascribed to her for the last six years, and still kept her at school.

An exciting time was arriving for the inmates of Bellfield House—the day of the breaking-up ball had been fixed, and the invitations sent out, so that the heads of the young ladies were occupied with nothing else but the preparations for the approaching festivity. Mrs. Hamper was, of course, coming: an instance had never been recorded of her declining a party, although she had been known, somehow or another, to have been present at a great many to which she had never received an invitation. But her advent was hailed this time, with great satisfaction by all the girls; as not only was she going to bring Sir Frederick Arden—having entirely forgiven him for his behaviour at Mrs. Gudge's fancy-fair—but she had even said that it was just possible one or two of the cornets of the “dear Twelfth” might be prevailed upon to come, if they had no better engagement. And when Fanny Hamper made this known, as a great secret, to all the girls in the school, there was such a fluttering in the dove-cot, and such visions of “those lovely mustachios,” that anything like study was done away with for that half, at least.

Of course the friends of all the pupils were to be invited; and those girls who had presentable brothers rose to a premium forthwith, and then each was asked innumerable questions about the brother: what his name was, and how old he was, and what he was like: whether he was fair or dark, if he waltzed well, and whether he was great fun or very proper. And sometimes they went so far as to say, “Does he know any nice fellows that he can bring with him?” But this was always put in great confidence; almost as private as the “Mind you introduce him to me for the first quadrille,” which followed.

There was one brother, however, whom they generally mistrusted: and this was Miss Pottle's, who received education from Mrs. Sadler in return for her father's candles. Not that there was anything to be ashamed of in bartering candles, but Mr. Pottle was not an eligible chandler, from what the girls had seen of him; and they trembled for his son. They never could find out what he was. Miss Pottle used to say he was 'in the army:' but a glimpse the school had once caught of him, when sitting on the roof of a Brentford omnibus, wearing a blouse, with a cigar in his mouth, and his legs hanging down, without straps, over one of the windows, did not give them altogether the idea of a military man—more especially as they were accustomed to see one or two occasionally. He was, however, coming; and the papa and mamma Pottle as well: but the inquiries about him were not made in the same spirit as the others.

The decoration of the ball-room—which was the school-room scoured—was left to the young ladies, Mrs. Sadler saying she always allowed them to do it according to their own taste: and this, as it saved any expense, was fortunate. The young ladies whose friends had shrubberies wrote to them for evergreens: and others made clothes-baskets full of silver-paper water-lilies and dahlias to grow on them. All the prize chalk and pencil drawings were nailed round the room, framed with laurel leaves. And Polka kettle-holders and urn-mats; guitar-pincushions; perforated card flower stands; and horticultural fire-screens—in fact everything that stamped Bristol board, gold strip, and gum-water could achieve—were displayed wherever there was an available peg or shelf, to hang or place them on.

To the elder young ladies, who could be trusted amongst the eatables without appropriating them on the sly, was entrusted the arrangement of the supper-table. Not the entire culinary department, that is to say; the blancmange, creams, and jellies, were properly ordered from an adjacent confectioner, Mrs. Sadler conceiving, with some reason, that to be the cheapest plan. But the more fanciful side dishes were left to the girls to provide—the figs stuffed with split-almonds and turned into hedgehogs—the quartered oranges (there were a great many of those)—the cup-shaped biscuits filled with jam—the tipsy cake and small sponge copies thereof.

Fanny Hamper furnished the kisses—they were rather in her line—and cracker bonbons: and when she went out for them, in her right of parlour-boarder, she insisted upon opening every one, and reading the motto to see whether it was fun: because, as she said, they were generally so stupid. Two or three of the best she kept quietly to herself and said nothing about it; and a few that were rather insulting than complimentary in their rhymes she laid by to be put where *Mademoiselle Le Brun* would have them offered to her. Kate Clifford had to arrange the table, and write on little tickets, 'potted beef,' 'ham,' 'collared eel,' 'Chantilly basket;' to show where those things were to come: and Laura Maurice's dishes of hard-boiled eggs cut in slices, placed on a disc of French roll, slightly sprinkled with cayenne pepper, and topped by a coiled shred of anchovy were pronounced the hits of the table.

The night came, and long before the company were expected, all the pupils were dressed and ready. It would have been difficult to have found a prettier selected edition of nature's works bound in white muslin, than were ranged along the benches of the ball-room, from the eldest pupil to the very little girls who sat in the first position, and made small jokes to one another, and giggled all the evening, as soon as they had got over their respect for so many caudles, and the general festive appearance of the room. Indeed, they were all very merry: for the teachers had to support Mrs. Sadler in receiving the company down-stairs, whilst they had tea: and Fanny Hamper had poked the French mark somehow or another, into Mr. Pitkins' little fiddle, which in an evil moment he had left behind him, against it was wanted. Do not think, however, that Mr. Pitkins was to form the band. No—there were a harp, piano, cornet, and flageolet, coming down by a Kew Bridge vehicle expressly for the purpose; but the small pupils were to perform some little dance which Mr. Pitkins had taught them; and of which he alone knew the music.

The girls were thinking that the company never would arrive when there was a double knock, and at the sound of it they all jumped up and clapped their hands; and then their suspense became excessive until the guests entered the room. They were Mr. and Mrs. Parker, parents of a pupil, and Master Parker, who was afraid to say 'how d'ye do' to his little sister before so many young ladies; but looked very red, and stood on the sides of his feet in the doorway, and bit the tops of his gloves until some more people came. Lady Turnham and Miss Green were the next. Miss Green had once been Mrs. Sadler's governess, and afterwards companion to Lady Turnham, whom she had succeeded in getting to come. Her Ladyship was an old lady, who painted and wore low dresses, but was never seen without a bonnet, which some imagined she even slept in. She was inducted to an arm-chair, placed expressly for her, by the fire: and there she remained all the evening, with Miss Green at her side to tell her about everything.

At last, after many more arrivals, a horn was heard in the distance, blown in a random manner, followed by the sound of wheels suddenly pulled up, at the door.

"It's Frederick! I'm sure," said Fanny Hamper to Kate; "oh! I'm so glad. Now we can begin."

But before the other could reply there was a scream from without, and then a confusion of several voices, after which came a great bustle in the passage. The guests were speculating upon what had come to pass when a servant came into the room, and requested Miss Hamper to step down-stairs for an instant. Quite alarmed, she was hurrying down when Mrs. Sadler met her and said:

"Don't be frightened, my dear Fanny, it is nothing as it has proved. Your good mamma has come down with Sir Frederick Arden, on a dreadful thing he calls a dog-cart, in company with another gentleman; and it tipped up in some extraordinary manner as they were getting off; but nobody was hurt."

Fanny went into the parlour, and there she found her mother in a state the servant ascribed as "rather fainty," sitting on the sofa and doing what she could to avoid swallowing a quantity of cold water, which everybody was trying to force down her throat, as is usual in such cases. Sir Frederick Arden was brushing some mud from his coat, and another gentleman was feeling Mrs. Hamper's pulse.

"It's all nothing, Fanny," said the Baronet, as he turned to the glass and arranged his neck-handkerchief. "I told Barnes not to jump off suddenly, because the trap wasn't balanced properly, but he would; and then it tipped up. How's the pulse, Barnes?"

"One, two, five, forty-eleven, eighteen," said Mr. Barnes—for that gentleman was of the party—making violent contortions of his face, expressive of counting difficult numbers.

"Oh! you droll creature, don't," cried Mrs. Hamper faintly. "You've nearly been the death of me once; and I'm sure you will be quite, before the evening is over. Thank you—that will do, I am quite well now."

Upon which, Mr. Barnes made a low bow—so low that it was difficult to foretell where his head was ultimately going to; backing at the same time against a visitor whom he nearly upset; and then poking his thumb against the waist of the servant, and going *ck-k-k-k!* all which performances being of infinite humour, threw Sir Frederick into convulsions.

"Oh! my dear Fanny," exclaimed Mrs. Hamper, to her daughter. "I have been so frightened. But it's nothing: you naughty, naughty, man," she added to Mr. Barnes. "The oddest person, my love," she continued to Fanny; "a great friend of Sir Frederick's. We came down together on his dog-cart."

"On his dog-cart, mamma!"

"Yes, my love," said Mrs. Hamper. "Why, the fact was this: the man in the mews wanted a guinea for a fly; and Sir Frederick made the offer of his conveyance for nothing: so you see, my dear, I thought I might just as well save the money. And do you know it was really all very pleasant; I may say delightful, except this little accident at last. But it's all over."

Upon this, Mr. Barnes, who caught up the last phrase, said, after the voice and manner of Punch, "It's all over, ladies and gentlemen," looking round into the passage as if it was the side of the show, and holding his hands also as Punch does.

And then, this little excitement over, they all went up to the ball-room.

There was a great buzz amongst the girls when Sir Frederick Arden entered, for his wild excursion to the Richmond ball with Fanny Hamper was traditionally known amongst them. And they were quite delighted with the sly look he gave Mrs. Sadler; and that lady's struggle, in return, between the dignified and the confidential. For she felt that if the affair was known to the world, it would, as Sir Frederick had said, do her more harm than good, so she had

taken no more notice of it. And now, a sufficiency of gentleman having arrived to form a set, the quadrille commenced.

Like all first quadrilles of the evening, this was rather a quiet affair; even Mr. Barnes had not come out, as Sir Frederick assured Fanny he would do, eventually. Indeed the only person who entered into was the little boy who had stood upon his twisted ancles; and he did his steps, and when he wanted to flirt, looked at his little partner and then squeezed her hand and laughed; but never said anything. How happy he was though, and how soon he got deeply in love!

Before the quadrille had finished, the "dear Twelfth" came; and great was the excitement their entrance created. Some of the girls were a little disappointed to see them in private clothes, dressed like any other gentlemen. They expected to see handsome warriors clank into the room all spurs and armour. But Fanny Hamper and her immediate friends, knew better; and felt their hearts terribly flurried, as the young officers arrived. Old Lady Turnham found out who they were; and then entertained Miss Green with a long account of all their families, with whom she was acquainted, until the next dance began, which was a waltz. And then the young ladies found how much easier it was to waltz with, the "dear Twelfth" than with each other—they were held up so well, they said.

After the waltz, of course, some refreshment was needed—delicious academical negus served out in a small room called the study, up stairs. And when the couples went off together to get it, they staid so long that Mrs. Sadler was obliged to go and hunt them down again—more especially as two of the young ladies were going to play the overture to *Semiramide*.

It is a dreadful thing that overture to *Semiramide* when played by amateurs; and the heart is a bold one which does not quake when its twenty or thirty pages are opened at the piano. And the worst of it is, when you are thanking the stars that a great deal of it has been got through, they turn back half-a-dozen leaves and begin again. The "tum; tum; tum; tum; tumtity tum!" of the beginning is enough to drive any one from the room who has once heard it laboured at; and even well-meaning, kindly-hearted people sometimes ask themselves what they have been guilty of to be thus punished. On the present occasion, however, etiquette compelled the company to appear transported; but they inwardly wished that the performers were the same.

Mr. Barnes, to be sure, was not particularly bored by it. He had got out upon the staircase with Sir Frederick, Fanny Hamper, Kate, Laura, and the young Cornet who had before been their companion; and was there going through a pantomimic sketch to the music within, which he called "The Avenging Ape, or the Murdering Mutineers," being a *résumé* of a piece he had once seen at a theatrical tavern; and the manner in which he ran up and down the stairs, and tumbled suddenly over the balusters, at the feet of old ladies coming up, and scratched his side quickly in the manner of a monkey, and made strange faces, and whistled, was pronounced to be imitable. Indeed, at last they

laughed so loud, that Mrs. Sadler came to look after them, and gave them such an awe-inspiring look, that no Astley's heroine, from the time of Timour the Tartar to the epoch of the Cataract of the Ganges, could have equalled it. Whereupon Mr. Barnes tumbled suddenly back through an unfastened door into a room appropriated to the supper before it was wanted; and very nearly succeeded in destroying a pastoral middle dish of a windmill with barley sugar sails, on a rock of something looking like green sponge, at the foot of which a fleet of anomalous boats were tossing on a sea of trifle. The small passengers were of coloured plaster of Paris with a division round their profiles which shewed they had been made in halves and stuck together, enclosing a motto: but they had not been placed with an eye to probability. For on one of the ships was a young lady, with a lamb; and on another a couple walking out with an umbrella; and there were no sailors anywhere. And the whole cargo of a curiously-fashioned lugger which was going into a dark hole in the green sponge rock consisted of a tub and a soldier. There was also a contrivance for putting a wax-candle end inside the windmill and lighting it all up from top to bottom, so that its transparent ecclesiastical windows could be seen to the best advantage.

This elaborate composition narrowly escaped entire destruction, at which Mrs. Sadler was very angry. But she was still more so, at having the supper exposed to the company. For all the superfluous furniture had been put in the room, as well, to be out of the way; and the benches of sandwiches and desks of jellies—the music-stools of tipsy cakes and practising square piano of side dishes generally, gave the apartment the appearance of having being the joint show-room of an upholsterer and confectioner, who had gone into partnership, but had not yet arranged their respective wares.

As the overture to *Semiramide* finished just at this moment, the assembled party went back to the ball-room, where they found Mrs. Hamper anxiously endeavouring to make up a card-table and persuade Lady Turnham to join. But it was of no use: and so Mrs. Hamper told Mrs. Sadler that she should like to dance.

It was exceedingly awkward, the request, to be sure. The old gentlemen in the party knew little about quadrilles—their dancing days had finished with the peace, just when the quadrilles commenced—and they only indulged in country dances, with intimate friends, very late on Christmas and New Years' Evenings. And Mrs. Sadler mistrusted the readiness of the younger ones to take Mrs. Hamper for a partner, when so many pretty girls, who still looked forward to seventeen, were about the room. But here the amiable Barnes, came to the rescue; he would be delighted to dance with Mrs. Hamper, and accordingly they stood up.

What Mr. Barnes did in that quadrille is impossible for any chronicle to hand to future ages. How he stood in the first position and pointed his toe where he began; how he addressed polite conventional conversation to Mrs. Hamper and said: "Do you like dancing?" or: "I think it's very warm to-night," or: "What a pretty sight it is to see the young people enjoying themselves?" all

these things can only be hinted at. And the pupils were in such extacies at his dancing—especially in *dos-à-dos* and *la Pastorale*; and so amazed at seeing an old lady like Mrs. Hamper standing up in a quadrille, that they forgot all their figures and forced Mr. Pitkin to keep walking round and round the set, to start the couples off when they did not dance enough, just as a *garde municipale* would have done at a French *bastringue* when they danced too much.

It was during this quadrille that Mr. Pottle arrived; and the girls saw in an instant that he was not altogether the thing. He was fair, with long, straight, light hair, and a straggling imperial upon his chin which he had evidently grown for the occasion. He had on a pink under waistcoat and a blue coat with brass buttons, from the hinder pocket of which a corner of his China silk handkerchief was studiously displayed; and altogether he looked as good a type of the party snoblet, as could be imagined. Mr. Barnes immediately descried him, and forthwith meant mischief.

Meanwhile the evening went on famously. The "dear Twelfth" found more pretty girls than they had ever before met at once in a room; and these sixteen-years-olds thought so much of moustachios, the introductions were sure to prove agreeable. Mrs. Sadler went round to all the parents and guardians, and inquired earnestly of each whether they would not take anything; and even caused quartered oranges and mixed biscuits to be brought to them by the page of the evening, who at other times supplied the establishment with milk. And when Mrs. Sadler was sure none of the other parents were listening, she assured certain relatives that their dear girls were the gems of her establishment, and that she had never before taken such a fancy to pupils in her life. This style of compliment, however, required a little tact to frame properly; for it was not unlikely that too delighted mammas would go and tell others of the kind things Mrs. Sadler had said of their daughters; and then these latter, by no means wishing to be outdone, would retail what the lady had also said to them, which being exactly in the same words, would be awkward.

Mr. Pottle did not waltz; and so was properly qualified to sneer at it, which he did in a corner; and Mr. Barnes having discovered this, resolved to turn it to account.

"Curious style of dancing, Sir," said Mr. Barnes to Mr. Pottle, as he watched a whirling round of waltzers.

"Very disgusting!" replied Mr. Pottle. "I should be sorry to see my sister hugged in that manner."

"I respect your sentiments, Sir," Mr. Barnes went on. "It ought not to be allowed, especially in an establishment intended to teach the young idea how to shoot. Indeed, in any society, it should be suppressed. Young ideas shoot quite fast enough, without such a hot-house as a ball-room."

"Look at that now," said Mr. Pottle, pointing to Sir Frederick Arden and Fanny Hamper, who were twisting away like teetotums. "Do you call that graceful, or even proper? I should have but a poor opinion of that girl who would permit any body to put his arm round her waist in that way."

"You are of my way of thinking," said Mr. Barnes. "Come and have a glass of wine, if you will allow me the pleasure."

Mr. Pottle readily agreed; and Mr. Barnes marched him off, looking at Sir Frederick Arden wickedly as he passed.

After the waltz, the little pupils performed their dance, under the direction of Mr. Pitkin, who appeared to have expended yards of shoe-ribbon on his pumps for the occasion, to make them striking. The little pupils were also wonderfully got up; and some of the very little ones indeed were put in such very short dresses, so wonderfully *bouffée's*, that the spectators at times trembled for the propriety of their appearance. But everything was performed with exceeding rectitude; and the parents were in extacies, the order of the quadrille only being disturbed by Master Andrew Pottle, the pet of the family, who had been brought uninvited, and who would run in amongst the dancers and interrupt them—a little outburst of pleasant spirit which quite delighted his parents. He was a horrible child though, in a plaid dress, which scarcely reached to his knees, to make him feel infantile, and his face always looked as if it had just been dry-rubbed with a coarse towel.

All this time Mr. Barnes was quietly telling all the men he knew to take wine with Mr. Pottle, which they incontinently did, and sometimes twice, complimenting him upon his attire, and drawing him out to talk about it. Sir Frederick and Fanny had finished dancing, and were now sitting behind a globe in the study, in deep conversation.

"And when are you going to leave school, Fanny?" asked the Baronet. "Why—let me see; you must have been here—"

"There, you need not count," replied Miss Hamper; "I have been here a great deal longer than I wished; and when Kate and Laura leave, which they are going to do, I shall be so very wretched. Quite alone, Frederick."

Fanny said these last words very pathetically. Sir Frederick went on:—"But what does your mother intend to do with you?"

"I am sure I don't know. I *must* be more independent. Besides, with my fortune, which is all my own and nobody can touch; I ought to be."

"I knew you had some money, Fanny," said the young Baronet, "and, knowing this, wondered how you could put up with being treated so like a child."

"But who have I got to appeal to?" she enquired, as she began eating the petals of her bouquet. "I am quite alone."

"Don't say so, Fanny," said Sir Frederick, as the young lady put on a very melancholy expression. "Why don't you make me your champion?"

A whirl of thoughts were flitting through the young Baronet's head. He had learned only that morning in an application to his mother for some money, that she had next to nothing at her command; and Fanny had been talking about "her fortune."

"What good would that lead to, Frederick?" asked Fanny.

"Well—that remains to be found out," said Sir Frederick. "Let us talk it over."

Leaving them to their conversation, we return to Mr. Barnes and his

select circle in the study, all of whom had been plying Mr. Pottle with wine, until they had even got him to sing them a song. And the party had been joined by Mr. Sadler, who had crept up from some unknown regions of the house, looking as if he had been cleaning the plate, and now entered into the conviviality of his wife's guests.

"I wonder you don't dance, Mr. Pottle," observed Mr. Barnes.

"Oh, I can dance," he said, confidentially closing one eye as he spoke. "I could show 'em what to do, if I had the chance."

"I think a hornpipe would be a great hit, if you could manage it," said Mr. Barnes: "or the minuet de la cour?"

"No—the first set: that's my line," said Mr. Pottle.

"Then I'll present you to a charming partner—the French young lady, Mademoiselle Le Brun."

"I can't parley-vo, if you want me to come that. No French kickshaw stuff for me. I'm regular English. Let's drink old England."

"Hear! hear!" said Mr. Barnes: "we will drink old England."

And some more wine was poured out and swallowed; and then Mr. Barnes led Mr. Pottle up stairs, and introduced him to Mademoiselle.

"I say," he murmured, aside to Mr. Barnes, when the presentation was effected, "she's such an old thing."

"Do you think so?" asked the other. "Oh no—it's her look. She's a charming person, I can assure you."

Mademoiselle was always ready to dance; and she stood up very readily with Mr. Pottle, who began to think what he should say to her. But his ideas were very bewildered, and he had some difficulty in keeping steady. When the quadrille began he lurched about fearfully, to the exceeding terror of the young ladies, and intense amusement of Mr. Barnes and his party, who were in a corner enjoying the fun. It was hard to tell where his legs, as he straggled about, did not get to, or to what distant corners of the ball-room he did not whirl his partner when he turned her. But Mademoiselle was evidently pleased; and as she saw the others looking at her, she imagined of course that she was the object of attraction, and assumed a girlish elasticity in her steps which was highly refreshing.

"Barnes," said Sir Frederick, coming up to his friend as he was watching the vacillating Pottle, "have you any money about you?"

"Yes. Why?" replied Mr. Barnes. "I've got four or five shillings."

"Oh! I wanted more than that," said the Baronet. "Never mind." And he went away.

"What the deuce can he want any money for here?" thought Mr. Barnes. "And how could he imagine that a medical student ever had more than five shillings about him? I wonder what he's after."

But his speculations were cut short at that moment, in company with the dancing career of Mr. Pottle, who, attempting a daring feat in pastorage when he was advancing by himself, lost his balance, and clutching wildly at Mademoiselle's dress to save himself, tumbled down upon the floor, pulling his partner after him.

There was very great confusion. The young ladies screamed; and the mischievous group who had plotted the catastrophe burst out into a

loud laugh. Mr. Pottle scrambled to his legs, and seeing their merriment made a dash at the foremost, who darting on one side, allowed his fist to go through the window. Mademoiselle hastily threw her shawl over her head, feeling that her hair was disarranged, and retiring into a recess would have fainted, but that she feared nobody would attend to her.

The young men surrounded Mr. Pottle, and hustled him out of the room, shutting the door quickly after them. But this did not prevent loud and angry voices from being heard on the staircase; and the alarm of the company was excessive.

"Where is Fanny?" said Mrs. Hamper, looking round the room. "I hope she is not in this terrible scene. Have you seen her, my dear Miss Clifford."

"No Ma'am," replied Kate. "Not for more than an hour. I can't think where she can be, I'm sure."

This was said with the least bit of malice; as Miss Clifford did not altogether approve of Fanny keeping one of the beaux—and that one a Baronet—to herself all the evening.

"I must go and look after them," said Mrs. Hamper. And the lady went into the drawing-room to see if her daughter was there.

But no—nothing like Fanny Hamper was visible. Nor was she in the study. Mrs. Sadler was too much overcome and upset by the late scene to give her any information; and she did not dare venture near Mr. Barnes and his party, who, dying with laughter, were doing all they could to sooth the indignant Pottle. But as she went down stairs, she saw some great excitement amongst the servants, who were wildly running about the passage, and in and out the street door; Mrs. Hamper's first impression being that they were looking after a policeman.

"Young woman!" she exclaimed, severely, as she caught the housemaid by the wrist, "what is the matter?"

"Oh Ma'am!" replied the servant. "One of the young ladies—"

"Who?" cried Mrs. Hamper.

"Yes, Ma'am," said the girl. "We think she's run away with one of the gentlemen here to-night."

"What do you mean?" said Mrs. Hamper. "Which young lady is it? Tell me, this instant!"

"If you please, Ma'am, it's Miss Hamper. Susan says she came down stairs with a little parcel, whilst the noise was up stairs, and went off at a gallop."

"What!" shrieked the good lady, as her senses appeared to forsake her and she fell back on the sofa—a trustworthy one by the way, to bear the shock as it did.

The information was all true. At that very moment Fanny Hamper with Sir Frederick Arden, both on the dog-cart, were tearing along the high road as fast as the horse could take them.

CHAPTER LII.

CHRISTOPHER ARRIVES AT CHESTER.

THE sun shone out, in the morning, and when Christopher awoke, he thought he had never seen its beams so bright and cheering as they then fell through the windows of one of the bed-rooms of the White Hart. He was all anxiety, as to the result of the proposed expedition : but it was anxiety of a pleasant kind ; for he felt that he had all to gain in the inquiry ; and that however it terminated it could not be to his disadvantage.

Mr. Mole had been released from his case, having introduced a small unit to the census of the neighbourhood about daybreak ; so Dr. Aston was quite at liberty to go, and the horse and chaise were at the door after breakfast. A visit to Chester was never without attraction for the good Doctor. For he knew a brother practitioner who had a twist of mind similar to his own, and took great delight in 'specimens' of every kind ; and when these two met, the shallow drawers that were examined, and probabilities discussed, and theories suggested, were marvellous to reflect upon. They knew the contents of every chalk and gravel pit all over the country ; there was not a heap of stones by the way-side which their hammers had not attacked ; and the whole archæological investigators could never find any facts connected with old buildings in the county that had not long ago been known to Dr. Aston and his contemporary.

Off they started in the early morning ; and a sunny and joyful one it was. They were not long in getting clear of the steam-engines and chimneys into the sweet pure leafy country. The dew still sparkled on the grass at the way-side, but it would soon be dried up : for the sky was clear and blue, only flecked by a few light woolly clouds which vanished before the climbing sun, as one looked at them ; and a light haze about the meadows announced the coming heat. Up from amongst the wheat fields, whose rich brown surface was scarcely swayed into a ripple by the air, the purple corn-flowers and the startling poppies now and then gently nodded to the passer by ; and the daisies which spangled the bits of turf and common were all eyes—staring at the sun and turning their heads round after him with such admiration as they opened their little hats, that they appeared as if it was the first time they had ever beheld anything so glorious. Out and away upon the horizon might be seen the blue heights of the Welsh mountains, rising one beyond the other until the most distant became confounded in their blue outline with the clouds that hovered about them.

The journey was very pleasant : and when, half of the fifteen miles that stretched between the Doctor's town and the city of Chester, had been traversed, they stopped to lunch at a little inn, every inmate of which—from the hearty landlord and his blooming wife to the last production which she held on one arm whilst she pulled down the handle of the beer-engine with the other—the Doctor appeared to have brought into the world. And then he patted the children's heads, and looked at

their arms where they had been vaccinated, and told the landlady that the bursting health upon baby's cheeks was all nothing; but that he would send a powder by the carrier, which would set everything to rights. When they started again he had an anecdote to tell about almost everybody they met, connected with some dreadful accident or fearful illness he had carried them well through—how one man had tumbled from a loft, and another had been recovered from drowning, and a third had been shot by poachers; and so on. But the present stalwart appearance of all of them spoke much in favour of the good Doctor's skill.

At last the journey was over; and the chaise rattled along the pavement of Old Bridge Street, in Chester—the city in which Christopher now learnt that he had drawn his first breath. How deeply interesting every crooked gable, and overhanging story, and discoloured twinkling casement appeared to him; as he imagined in turns that each might have been, in some way or another, connected with his early career. But apart from this feeling the venerable city struck him forcibly; for Chester was still the same, as upon the stormy March evening when we commenced our story. Still equally picturesque were the broken lines of its streets and pointed roofs—its rows, and porches and straggling architecture—its glowing walls and towers, and weather-beaten ramparts, with the old worn steps, and uneven pathways, and blackened timbers. Christopher had seen nothing so fine in all England—at least as much as he had gone over, and that was no small portion.

They stopped at one of the hotels, where the Doctor ordered dinner; and then told Christopher to stroll about the town, and amuse himself, whilst he went to see his old friend and brother-practitioner. In this manner, on both sides, an hour or two passed away, until they again met; and, after their meal, adjourned to the little parlour behind the bar where the landlord, who had been out all the morning, was asked to join them in a glass or two of wine.

"Well, Bob," said Dr. Aston, to the waiter, as they were leaving the coffee-room, "is there much doing here just now?"

The waiter was an ancient man bent nearly double; with a few hairs, of a pepper and salt tint, scattered about his head. His cuffs hung over his hands, and no one could see into what obscurity the ends of his dingy white neckcloth retired after their mission of forming a knot had been accomplished. The soles of his shoes and the oil-cloth of the coffee-room had worn out one another for thirty or forty years; so that he was old in the service when Gudge had first met him; for he was the same Bob. And since then he had never but once had a holiday; which he had passed in the coffee-room of an adjacent hotel, going to see a brother waiter, and folding the napkins and filling the cruets for him, against a large dinner which was coming off next day: the pleasantest few hours, as he afterwards asserted, that ever he remembered to have passed.

"Not a great deal moving, Sir," replied Bob, in answer to the Doctor's questions; "all owing to the railway. How can people find heart to eat or drink when they're shot along two bits of iron

like a rocket? If they sleep here, they're in too great a hurry to get to bed at night; and obliged to racket up too early in the morning to catch the train, to take anything. Just look at that, Sir," he added, as he placed a cruet before the Doctor.

"I see it," said Dr. Aston.

"Yes, Sir," continued Bob. "Now I dare say you wouldn't think that Cayenne's a year old; but it's a fact. People won't wait for fish, now. 'Anything that's ready, directly,' they says; and they can swallow tea and soup red hot. Their throats get case-hardened to it at Wolverton. Every man his own biler, I says. Pint paleale Sir? yessir."

The last words were addressed in reply to an order; and as Bob shuffled off to attend to it, Dr. Aston and Christopher went into the bar, and sat down with the landlord.

They talked upon some few trifling and local matters, and then came to the subject of their journey.

"Mr. Waites," said the Doctor, "have you any recollection, about a score of years ago, of a lady being taken ill here. I chanced to be in the house and attended her; and she died, after giving birth to a little boy."

"Poor thing!" exclaimed the landlady. "Deary me; it seems as if it was only last week. I took the baby, I remember as well as possible, and held it, whilst they sent to my sister's for some clothes; for there was no preparations made."

"You don't think you could recognize the baby again if you saw him," observed Dr. Aston, smiling, as he grasped Christopher by the shoulder; whilst an expression of astonishment broke from the landlady and his wife. "There's no mistake about it," continued the good old gentleman; "there he is, and I wish you could tell us a little more about him."

"We always thought you were in the secret, Doctor," replied the landlady; "for after the baby was put to nurse in your town we never heard anything more. Where they came from, or where the gentleman went to afterwards, was always a mystery."

"And the lady?" asked Christopher, in a voice tremulous with agitation.

"We put the poor body in the burial ground of Old St. Bridget's Church," continued the landlady. "You recollect, Sir, we were the only mourners," he added, turning to Dr. Aston; "for the gentleman went off the same night, or rather at daybreak, after he left the money. And I saw about the tablet; it was a plain stone with only the name 'ANNIE' on it, and the date and age. She was but 17."

"And where do you say that is?" asked Christopher, eagerly.

"Ah! I don't know now," said the other. "The church was pulled down soon after in '28, when the road was made to the new bridge, and all the bodies were removed, as well as they could do it. The stone got broken, and I never knew about it after."

There was a pause of a minute in the conversation. Christopher's eyes were glistening, and he sat gazing vacantly at some unimportant picture on the wall.

"And what do you suppose was her name?" he asked.

"The gentleman's name was Edwards—so he said at least, and so he was called by somebody who was here as well, that night. But we had reason to think afterwards that was not his name."

"Oh! if I could but recollect what happened in my infancy," said Christopher, earnestly, as he wrung his hands together. "I could get some clue—some glimmer, perhaps, of light. But I cannot call to mind anything beyond the mine—going down into it with the man I thought was my father, and coming back again to the cottage, always in the dark. You do not know even where the stranger came from?" he asked turning to the landlord.

"No; that I don't now," replied the other.

"Stop!" exclaimed Mrs. Waites; "now I come to think of it, old Sam Piper was the post-boy. I remember it because he was wet through, and I sent his jacket to the kitchen-fire to dry; and afterwards we found that, all the time, there had been a flask full of gunpowder in the side-pocket.

"And where is this old Sam Piper?" enquired Dr. Aston.

"Ah! there it is," answered the landlord. "He got into some scrape about poaching; he always had a hare or some birds under the seat of his return post-chaise, I recollect, somehow or another. I dare say, though, Bob can tell."

And so Bob was directly summoned, and interrogated as to his knowledge of the Mr. Piper in question.

"Oh, I know him fast enough," replied the waiter. "He's all sorts of things, over at Handbridge. He's given up the road for rats, and he keeps ferrets, and sells fowls; does a bit of smuggling too, now and then I hear; and isn't difficult about getting you a pheasant in September, not if it's wanted werry particular for a invalid."

One or two of these pursuits did not reflect the highest lustre upon Mr. Piper's general character for honesty; but the blemishes were overlooked in the wish to meet him.

"Can we see him," asked Christopher, "at once?"

"Well I don't know about directly," replied Bob; "he isn't by no means easy to hit flying. I think I could get him though. It wouldn't do for you to go, because he'd think you'd come after no good. I must tell him we want a Dee salmon, and then he'll bring it from his private stream. You must buy it though, if he comes."

"Oh: I'll take it," said Dr. Aston; "but what do you mean by his private stream?"

"Ah! that's curious enough," replied Bob; "there's a bit of a ditch in his garden where he says he catches all his salmon. It isn't two foot across; and what's odder, the water comes through a grating to get there, and goes by the side of a road; but he gets as many from it as ever is wanted. I think it's best not to ask, how; for there's a salmon-cage you know, not far from his house, on the river; and besides, the nets he's got at home would cover an acre. When he's asked what he does with them, he

says it's to keep his wall-fruit from the birds; but bless you! he's got no fruit except a hedge of nat trees; and birds can't make much out of filbuds. He's a clever fellow though, mind you."

Bob's evident admiration of Mr. Piper's numerous talents, would have kept him talking all the evening, had not Christopher again enquired whether a personal interview could be obtained.

"Oh! I can manage it," said Bob; "if I may go, master. There's only two sherry's-and-water in the coffee-room, and they're beginning to make sporting-bets; so they won't want much more."

"How do you know that?" asked Dr. Aston, smiling at the waiter's prognosis.

Bob, who appeared to be more than ordinarily communicative, replied forthwith:—

"I can tell 'em all now, Sir. The minute gentlemen begins to say they've got a pony or a dog they'll back against any other to do everything, they don't have any more to drink—all their time's taken up in talking, and they've all got their own cigars. I prefer them that comes in and orders a small pale ale, and the Globe, whilst they think about what they shall have: it's sure to lead to a steak and stout, with oyster sauce; a pint of wine, and walnuts; coffee, liqueur glass of pale brandy, and then a go of gin to begin the evening. That's the thing, depend upon it."

"Why you have studied these things very closely," said the Doctor.

"I ought to, Sir," said Bob. "I've been at it nigh upon forty year. I always look shy at the grumblers. A gent used to dine here, who always found fault with the joint; it was either done too much, or not warmed through; or not hung enough, or been kept too long. And do you know at last he owed me five pound, which I lost. Then we had a man who used to sit here the whole evening on a glass of ale, and smoke cigarettes. We called him the friendly gent, because he would shake hands with everybody, even after once meeting them; but they used to say his hand felt just like a cold boiled sole cut into slips. I believed 'em."

The Doctor almost shuddered at the simile.

There is nothing so sickening as the presentation of a limp hand which cannot return a grasp. Never put much trust in its owner; for he is either meanly cunning, or contemptibly feeble-minded. And be cautious, also, of your enthusiastic wringers, who grasp your hand like a vice, upon a first interview, and throw an expression of beaming delight into their faces, intended to make you believe that the great object of their life is accomplished in meeting you. Believe rather in the warm hearty shake where the forks of the thumbs and first fingers closely meet each other, and the very wrist is almost included in the grasp, without squeezing all the blood away from the hand for five minutes afterwards, and pressing the fingers together like figs in a drum. The man who does this, and looks you well in the face at the same time, has not much harm about him. If he cannot bear to meet a direct gaze, he is either a lunatic or a swindler—most probably the latter.

When Bob had finished, Mr. Waites told him he might go over to Handbridge to look after his acquaintance; upon which he started off forthwith, apparently in common with his class, looking upon a hat as a useless incumbrance. We suppose waiters have hats; but we never yet knew any who wore them. We should as soon expect to see a cabman with an umbrella.

He returned in a very short time—during which, however, Christopher had asked fifty questions of the landlord, few of which could be answered—with the intelligence that Sam Piper was not expected at home that day; but that he might be relied on the following morning. In consequence of which, Christopher determined to stay at Chester that evening, agreeing with the Doctor that it would scarcely be worth while going back to the town to return so soon.

Accordingly Dr. Aston departed, wishing Christopher every success in his investigation, and making him promise to tell him all about it, as soon as he had discovered anything. When he was gone, Christopher remained at the hotel, walking about the passages, seeing the room in which he was told that he had been born, and thinking upon what he had heard, turning over various chances and probabilities in his mind until he became almost bewildered with his speculations; and then, by way of relief, he walked out into the city, to seek some little diversion from his oppressing thoughts in its quaint and venerable thoroughfares.

A flood of ruddy autumnal light, as the sun went down behind the now purple mountains, bathed each corroded spire, and shone back in ruby gleams from the windows and lattices of the old buildings that towered above the rest of the city. Above, the sky was clear and deeply blue until it merged into the sunset tint; and its hue was reflected in the river below, which, after flowing on between the leafy banks and rich pastures up the stream, fell over the water causeway with a soothing murmur to pass more turbulently under the picturesque bridge; until, once more tranquil, it skirted the fresh green sward of the Roodce, its smooth surface broken only by the dimpling eddies.

In the growing twilight everything spoke of rest and tranquillity. It was a time of hope and trust, and every better thought and wish. Its calm entered into the mind, and softened the harsher feelings, as its subdued light did the rude outlines of the surrounding objects. And as Christopher leaned against the time-worn parapet and looked upon the goodly prospect, he felt that nature had never spoken to him with such mute but encouraging eloquence; nor read him so cheering a lesson of a good time to come, as she did in the promise which the glowing heavens gave of a bright and sunny morrow.

CHAPTER LIII.

IN WHICH SPROUTS AND BESSY PAYNE ARE MUCH INTERESTED.

ALL this time things had been looking up in the court over which Sprouts's library diffused knowledge and amusement. From the penny romances of the "Mabel the Mildewed" school, people began to enquire for magazines, and lastly for three volume novels; and these, with a rush of shilling serials, gave an impetus to Tom's business which almost frightened him by its vastness.

And Bessy Payne too, was flourishing. All her productions were so much admired, and she showed such taste in making them—even improving upon the red-lipped ladies with the wasp waists and next-to-invisible feet who figured in the fashion books—that the entire neighbourhood patronized her. And then the silver paper model dolls disappeared, and real articles took their places—wicked bonnets, sly caps, and insinuating collars; and sometimes Bessy was obliged to have two, and even three young ladies to help her, who brought their dinners in little square baskets, and remained all day. Then it was they laughed to such an extent that Sprouts could hear them right across the court; and, upon such occasions, would pop over every now and then, and beg to be let into the jokes as well. Sometimes they did so; but more frequently they said that they couldn't tell him—oh no, not for ever so much! which being a vague bribe, both as to quantity and specification generally, was never offered. But after that, the laughter always became louder than ever; and lasted until Tom saw anybody go into his shop, upon which he would rush over the court again, and, with a face still lighted up by the merriment of the little party, hand over the packet of tinsel dots which were to adorn Mr. T. P. Cooke in six favourite and energetic characters; or the last number of the prevalent literary excitement, which a few more thumbings would utterly destroy.

Patsy was a constant visitor, and even, in her humble way, at the theatres, she was enabled to be of some service to Bessy Payne in the way of sending her sister fays to her friend, when they wanted any skirts or bodies of filmy material made up on their own account. And Patsy herself was in possession of a perfect little income, and this was how she came to it.

One fine morning she was making a short journey in a river steam-boat—looking down through the hatches at the huge beams of the engines as they rose up so recklessly and yet always stopped short of doing any mischief; and thinking how hot the poor man must be who was always poking up the fires, and slamming about the red-hot doors of furnaces and flues, and pulling or turning all sorts of scorching taps and bolts and pump-handles—when she observed, by a side glance, that a gentleman was looking at her very attentively. He had not the air of a gallant—very far from it, for,

although young, he was especially untidy about his dress, and he wore spectacles; whilst his hair was in such disorder, that when he took his hat off, which he did now and then to let the wind blow through it, it all stood out wildly like that of the little figure who appears so scared when screwed on to the electrifying machine. But he kept his eyes so fixed upon Patsy, that she gave up her speculations upon the manner in which the engines were of use to the boat, and went and sat down by the man at the wheel, which was also another mechanical enigma to her. To her annoyance, the stranger followed her; and looked at her just as steadily as before; and just as she was once more about to change her position he addressed her:—

“I beg your pardon for the liberty I am taking in speaking to you,” he said; “but it is in your power to do me a great service.”

Poor Patsy blushed, and trembled, and had a slight notion of throwing herself upon the protection of the man at the wheel. But she made no reply.

“I am an artist,” he said; “that is my card.”

Patsy’s impression now was, that he was one of those ingenious gentlemen who cut out profiles, without the permission of the original, in black paper, and then await an optional purchase. So she took the card and looked at the name, which was “Mr. Gilpy.”

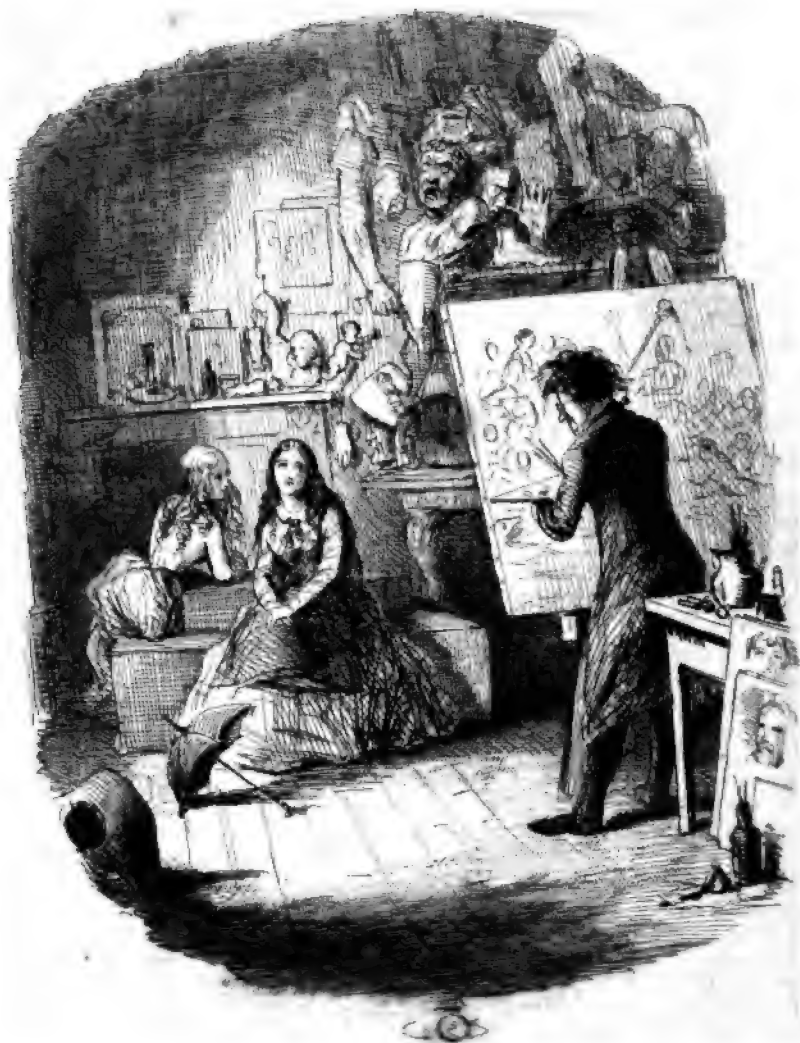
“I am painting a large allegorical picture,” he said, “and your’s is just the face I want for one of the figures. If you have no objection, and will come to my house to-morrow morning for an hour or so, I will remunerate you for your trouble. I hope you will not feel offended at the offer.”

The gentleman spoke so respectfully, and looked so exceedingly harmless, that Patsy told him, if he pleased she would ask her friends about it, and let him know. And then as the boat came alongside the pier at which she was to debark, she wished him good morning, and took his card away with her, wondering what possible use she could be to a picture with such a hard name.

She applied to Sprouts directly, and Tom knew the name very well—he had often seen it in the illustrations to different periodicals—and he told her it was all right, and that she need not mind going. But she would not do so alone—at first: she wanted Tom to go with her. He, however, could not leave his shop, but he thought that Bessy might spare an hour, and he would go over and see. The little milliner readily agreed, and they appointed the time the next morning. When it came, they went together to the artist’s. He was not at home when they called, but was expected in every minute: so the servant asked them to sit down in his painting-room.

It was a large uncarpeted apartment, lighted by one out of three windows, and that was half-closed by a shutter, the others being entirely obscured. There did not appear to have been a broom in it for many years, and indeed it was awful to speculate upon the amount of damage that would have attended the introduction of one; for every available corner was occupied by a plaster cast, or a small bottle of something, the contents of which nobody could





My dear friend

form a further idea of than that it would make a terrible mess if knocked over. The plaster casts were all fragments—large hands, tremendous toes, agonized heads expressing such screaming pain that you winced to look at them; and decapitated and dismembered trunks, hoisted up on shelves and brackets in most helpless state, all, more or less, smoked and grubby. Then there were mysterious sketches and pictures—the most valuable of which were altogether invisible, appearing to have been painted with pitch and red ochre in the literally dark ages; and by the side of these were, here and there, beaming female faces of the present day which were very little prized, since only the disciples of low art cared to produce natural and pleasing objects. And there were quantities of ladies and gentlemen upon unframed canvass leaning against one another like slates for roofing; whilst over everything hung an atmosphere of dust and varnish, with a suspicion of tobacco, so thick, that whenever the sunbeams got by chance into the room, they floated upon it at their ease, coming out remarkably strong with such a good medium for display.

Patsy and Bessy Payne were wondering at all these different objects when Mr. Gilpy arrived. He was very pleased to meet her: and when he saw Bessy's pretty sunny face, his delight increased: for she formed a direct contrast to Patsy, and he told her, if she could spare the time, he should be equally glad to avail himself of her services, at all events for that morning. And then making them take off their little bonnets, which he put on two of the plaster heads before alluded to, he directed them in their attitudes.

"This is the sketch of the picture I am painting," he said, handing them a sheet of paper, on which the subject was lightly traced: "It represents Neptune signing a treaty with Commerce and Enterprise, surrounded by his nymphs. I wish you to be two of the nymphs—those at the edge of the car."

Patsy and her friend felt really very uncomfortable as they looked at the nymphs, wondering to what their share in the representation would be confined. But Mr. Gilpy soon dispelled their anxiety, saying:

"I only want your heads, you know. Perhaps you will have the kindness to let down your hair: my housekeeper will help you to put it all to rights again, when I have finished."

This was another cause of blushing; but Patsy knew she had very beautiful hair, and so did Bessy too,—and if she had not known it she must have been very stupid, considering how often Tom had told her so. So with a little confusion they took out their combs, and shook their silky tresses, laughingly, about their shoulders, and then fell into the attitudes which Mr. Gilpy required, upon the steps of a sort of raised platform covered with red cloth.

"That will do very nicely," he said; "tell me when you feel tired."

And taking up an implement which looked like a drum-stick that had outgrown its strength, he began to paint.

They waited there about an hour; and then took their leaves, Mr. Gilpy requesting that they would come again. This Bessy feared that she should not be able to do; but Patsy, now that she had seen how very well-behaved the artist was, and what a proper proceeding the whole affair had become, agreed immediately, and made an appointment for the following morning. This went on for several days, and when Mr. Gilpy had finished his picture, and did not require her services any more just at that present time, he gave her a note to a brother artist; and through him she got recommended to another, so that in a little time she had quite a paying connexion; and as it was always in the morning that she was wanted, she was enabled to attend to her duties at the theatre just the same, except when there were rehearsals, and then she arranged accordingly. So that affairs, generally, were in a very good way with everybody.

"Bessy," said Sprouts one day very gravely to his little friend, as they were returning from a Sunday dinner at the jolly man's, "Bessy, do you know what I've been thinking about?"

"Lor—no, Tom; how should I?" returned his fair companion; "perhaps about whether it will be fine next Sunday, to show me the sea—I am to see it next Sunday, Tom; am I not? Oh—don't you hope it will be fine? I can't imagine what the sea can be like."

"No—it wasn't that, Bessy," said Sprouts, "although you shall see it, of course—excursion train, day ticket, and take a basket to dine on the beach."

"How nice!" cried Bessy, squeezing Tom's arm and quite shuddering with the anticipation of the excitement.

"Yes—but it isn't that," said Tom. "I have been thinking of something very wonderful. You see, Bessy, that the winter will soon be here."

"Yes, Tom."

"Well; and then we shall want coals and candles, and shall not be able to get out so much, and the weather will be bad, and the evenings long, and all the rest of it."

"To be sure, Tom: what then?"

"Why—just this, Bessy. Don't you see that one fire can warm two people, and the same light do for two; and that two can't be lonely? Don't you think, as we are both doing very well, that we had better get married now as soon as we can? There—that's it: and now it's all out."

"Lor, Tom!" cried Bessy, "I'm sure—really—you are so very sudden! You have almost taken my breath away."

"No—not quite," said Tom, as he put his arm round her little waist, and pressed it so tightly, that he might have done so. Whereupon a small boy who was walking behind, cried out: "Don't believe him, Mary," upon mere speculation; and then ran away round the corner frightened at his own daring.

"There now, Tom, how tiresome you are; and in the street too," said Bessy, pretending to be offended, but dying with joy all the time.

She, however, knew that it was proper not to appear too happy; and, by great resolution continued:

"It will be plenty of time to think about that when the winter comes, you dear old Tom—always in such a hurry!"

"No—it will not," said Sprouts. "Is there any reason why we should not be married directly?"

"Oh—Tom—what a question?"

"Yes, I know," replied he; but that's no answer. Now come, Bessy; I'm really in earnest. Why can't we be married at once?"

"It seems so!" answered the little girl.

"So what?" asked Tom.

Bessy didn't know.

"Come," he continued; "there's no occasion in the world for us to put it off any longer. I vote for next Sunday: what do you say?"

"But I've not got any things, Tom," said Bessy, throwing milder obstacles in the way.

"Why—whose have you got on to-day then, or been wearing for the last ever-so-long?" asked Sprouts.

"Oh—they're mine, you know, Tom: to be sure," said Bessy; "only you are so foolish. Everybody always has everything new when they are married."

"But do you suppose I should like you a bit the better, in the grandest things ever made," said Tom. "Then what's the use of the expense? There would be something new to be sure," he continued laughing: "an old letter would have to be picked out in the marking, and a new one put in. 'Bessy Sprouts!' can you fancy it?"

Bessy could, very well, but she did not say so, albeit she had written the name over a thousand times.

"Then say Sunday, Bessy—eh?" Tom went on quickly. "That's a whole week you know; and you won't have a great way to move. I'll think about dividing the window to-morrow. I've had a plan a long time."

"I thought, though, that I was to see the sea next Sunday, Tom," Bessy observed with as much innocence and wickedness as could well go together.

"So you shall—just the same," said Tom: "only with this difference you know; that if we don't want to be hurried, we need not care about the return ticket."

"Oh! my goodness, Tom!"

"Then it shall be next Sunday?"

Bessy really wouldn't give a decided answer: it would take all night to think about, but she would let him know on the morrow. And although Tom pretended to get frantic, she would not alter her determination; only when she wished him good night as they arrived at home, it was perhaps as well that there was nobody else in the court. But when the morrow came, albeit we shall not tell whether she had any severe struggle with his feelings, or otherwise, upon so eventful a subject, she told Tom, it was very sudden to be sure—still keeping up a remnant of objection—but it should be as he wished.

And from that moment Tom went quite wild. He rushed about the streets, and backwards and forwards to Mr. Chirpey; and neglected his business to such a frightful extent that people got first volumes of some books and second volumes of others: and those right-minded customers who took in virtuous tracts, got numbers of 'comic songster's companions' left at their houses instead. But these things, just at the present moment, were very excusable. He also told Mr. Chirpey that he had been rash and daring enough—to say nothing of the impropriety—to have the bans published in the church on the previous Sundays, unknown to his intended, and had always ingeniously prevented Bessy from being there to hear them: and shewed various stores of smart crockery and trim furniture that he had already bought and concealed against the event: and altogether disclosed such long-planned and deeply-laid villainies that Mrs. Chirpey at last was driven to say 'she never did!'

And Bessy! All her customers also were forgotten, and yet all her usual assistants were at work with double ardour, but this time it was for herself. Every evening she also went to Mrs. Chirpey's, and there long mysterious interviews took place, at the conclusion of which, when they came into the parlour again, where the jolly man and Sprouts were also communing, then Mr. Chirpey would hope that they had settled everything to their satisfaction: and wink, and stick his fingers into Tom's side, and point towards the ladies with his thumb, over his shoulder: and sometimes hazard such very extraordinary remarks that Bessy really scarcely knew which way to look. But with all this, the days of the week flew on as if Time had had a bailiff at his heels.

One thing, and one thing only, was a matter of regret; and it was that their friend Christopher was not amongst them. But they consoled themselves with thinking how surprized he would be to find it all out upon his return, for he was not to be told before. Patsy was to be one bridesmaid, of course, and a little niece of Mr. Chirpey's another: and Sunday was the day agreed upon, the jolly man insisting that they should all start from his house, and that he would give the dinner afterwards.

"It shall be a dinner you know," he said: "not a breakfast. What's the use of having a breakfast in the afternoon; that's all nonsense you know. I wonder, if they have breakfast at that time, when they sup:—some time next day I reckon."

Special invitations were forwarded to Hickory and Skittler, from whom the ceremony was to be kept a great secret until dinner time, when the announcement of it was to be one of the great effects of the day. And on the Thursday and Friday, Bessy made holiday altogether and went down into the country to tell her friends—she had not many: one or two quiet old world people who lived in cottages—of the event: and from them she came back laden with quaint humble presents—an old Apostle tea-spoon, a Toby Philpot jug, a patchwork quilt, and such like: together with promises of all the flowers on the Saturday night that the gardens still afforded.

Nobody at all interested in the matter knew how the intervening

days passed, every thing was in such a whirl. Even Mr. Chirpey declared that he felt quite "off his beer,"—that was his phrase,—from the want of a little quiet to enjoy it properly with his pipe. For as the time drew nigh, his good lady got so nervous and, as he expressed it, "worryt," that at last he went into one of his outbuildings, and shut himself up in the advertising Red Boot, with his jug and tobacco, where he remained for several hours, taking the chair, as it were, to the party of Highland snuff-takers, cheap tea Chinese, golden lions, little dustpans, and original tea kettles around him. And so things went on until the all-important Sunday came.

Bessy was the guest of Mrs. Chirpey the previous evening, in order that she might be properly dressed betimes the next morning; and Patsy and the little niece were also accommodated for the night. Sprouts was there early the next morning: accompanied by Mr. Chirpey's steward-brother; and very blythe and gay Tom looked. He was not driven to those shifts for a wardrobe now, that awaited all his holidays when we first knew him. No—everything was made to measure, and new—spick and span new. He had the finest waistcoat that had ever been known to have existed without spontaneous combustion by its own intensity; a frock coat with a real deep velvet collar; trowsers of such an imposing check pattern, that they even looked alarming when hanging over the back of a chair, and when on, absolutely commanded the respect of the spectators; and a hat and boots so glossy that the raven at the hackney-coach-stand suffered by the comparison when he hopped in his usual lop-sided manner after Tom and tried to peck his heels—lured and dazzled by his splendour as French larks are by the twirling mirrors. The only living things who were not inspired with awe at his appearance were the boys—but the boys never respect anybody. They marched behind him like policemen; or ran at his side and shouted, "Heads up, soger!" or made rude allusions to the marketable price of his trowsers if the straps were taken off. And when at last he called a cab, in self-defence, and drove off in it, they hurrah'd him and ran behind; not from any knowledge of the event about to take place, but from that general festive disposition which the boys in the streets have; and their never-failing desire to promote conviviality—that same feeling of overflowing enthusiasm which, in former times, brought urchins from cottages and ditches, until they almost rushed under the very wheels, to cheer the passing coach. But Tom, despite his uneasiness at their salutation, almost felt them as so many compliments; and mentally bowed to them in return, until the last hanger-on, finding the cab was going in an unsuitable direction quitted his seat upon the spikes—which he had held in spite of the oft-repeated "Whip behind!" of his false friends—and ran off to see the result of a difference of opinion entertained between a policeman and a fruit merchant.

When Tom got to Mr. Chirpey's, the cab drove into the yard, and there he saw, not only another cab, but a fly of the highest character drawn up at the door. And looking up at the window, a little female face peeped over the blind, and then bobbed away so rapidly that, it

was evident, it did not yet consider itself quite fit to be seen. And the door was opened by Mrs. Chirpey's maid, who had on a cap, the front border of which only came to the parting between her front and back hair, or phrenologically speaking upon the organ of firmness, which did not, however, give it any portion of its attribute to the sight, as it had every appearance of flying away behind, and was only retained where it was by some cunning contrivance, as mystic as it was invisible.

Breakfast was over, long ago; but there were two decanters—one of red currant and the other of ginger wine—upon the table, and a pound cake, cut into window-wedges, on a green plate between them. Mr. Chirpey, who was also got up on an extensive scale for the occasion with a large brooch and a white felt hat, and a blue coat with bright brass buttons, insisted upon Sprouts drinking several glasses of each, to keep his courage up. "For," he said, "when a man was going to be hung they allowed him a little wine; and therefore Tom was certainly entitled to it before he was married." And this joke—albeit it has been made in various degrees of refinement by the party most disposed to mirth, at every wedding, it is supposed, that ever took place, and always at the expense of the bridegroom—never loses its poignancy, but is always rewarded with a laugh. The jolly man's steward-brother knocked the table, and said "Good again!" and Mrs. Chirpey's maid pretended she was ashamed to be seen smiling at it, and yet wished it to be known that she did so.

"But where's Bessy?" asked Tom.

"Oh—she's all right, up above," said Mr. Chirpey. "They've been getting her ready ever since seven this morning; she must be a walking pincushion by this time. She'll take as long to unroll as the mummy that the gentleman exhibited to 'The People,' when that very respectable set of individuals hired my workshop and bolted without paying. Have another glass."

"No—no more," said Tom.

"Yes, do; to drink luck. And now, as you are going really to begin life, mind my words which I taught you long ago, but which I dare say you've forgotten. Don't mistrust every body—it's a bad line to begin business upon—but think there is some good folks in the world. Only if you ever have business to do with a friend of 'The People'—why—look sharp after him: that's all."

And Mr. Chirpey here nodded so gravely that Tom did not know what answer to make. But a turn was given to the conversation by the noise of somebody flying down stairs as though the most dreadful thing you can imagine had been upon her heels.

"Now I know what that is," said Mr. Chirpey; "more pins. They've been at that game ever since daylight. If more than a certain number of women were to be married in one day, Birmingham couldn't stand it. I can't tell where they put them all. If I was the bride, I don't know what I wouldn't do, short of murder, sooner than sit down to-day, or lean against anything."

At last Mrs. Chirpey came down, and told them that everything was

ready; upon which the steward and Tom got into one of the cabs, and went off to the church. And, as they got to the doors, who should they see but Skittler and Hickory—just as if the secret could have been kept from them! They looked no disgrace to the party. Poor old Hickory had furbished up his coat, with renovator and new buttons, and had put on a clean shirt collar so high that it almost touched his hat; and Skittler had a new glossy velveteen shooting-coat, and long gaiters that gave him the air of a head game-keeper on a gentleman's estate. They did not come into the church with them, but followed at a distance, and took their places, very humbly, on the free seats, where, as Skittler somewhat unthinkingly said, they could see the whole match.

They had not long to wait. The fly brought up the jolly man and the bride; and Mrs. Chirpey with the two bridesmaids came in the other cab; and when they had all assembled, the clerk shewed them where to stand, and the ceremony began.

Tom had not seen Bessy before that morning; and when he did, despite the solemnity of the occasion, he could not help looking at her with greater love and admiration than ever. Whatever the number of pins might have been employed in the toilet, they certainly had not been thrown away; for there was not a fold or a wrinkle in her dress, which was simply of white silk, but made in such a manner that could her customers have ensured a similar appearance, Bessy would soon have been a very rich little woman. She was crying—of course; that was all right and proper to be done; and this made Patsy cry, which was equally correct, although she did not know why, beyond that such a proceeding was expected on these occasions. And when Mrs. Chirpey saw the two in tears, she also commenced wiping her eyes from sympathy; and the small niece took up the epidemic, and was only restrained from a violent outburst of anguish by the curtailed dimensions of the pocket-handkerchief with which she had been furnished; and which, to a superficial observer, might have passed for the piece of stamped paper from the top of a French plum-box.

The jolly man fixed his attentions less upon the ceremony than any of the others. He looked about, especially at the roof, and took snuff, and read the monuments. But Hickory was particularly attentive; and under his guidance, and by his example, Skittler behaved with very commendable propriety. So that altogether the ceremonial was very nicely concluded; and then the chief actors all went through a little door, into the vestry, where various names had to be signed, and small sums of money paid—in all of which transactions, be sure, that the jolly man had a very principal part; and more remarkably so in the latter.

And it was during this time that Hickory left the church; and when he got to the door, he took off his hat and disclosed therein, to Skittler, a lot of little white favours, which Patsy—who had, truth to tell, betrayed the secret—had made up an evening or two before. And from within the lapel of his coat he drew forth an army of pins, that might even have supplied the bride's cushion; and, with Skittler's

aid, proceeded to put one on each of the blinkers of the horses, aided by a bit of string, and also on the whips, and even on the driver's hats; and had he possessed a hammer and tacks, there is no doubt but that he would have edged the top of the cab with them in the same festive fashion. For, as it happened, curiously enough, the provision of the bouquets, having been everybody's business, came to be nobody's; and, but for Patsy's forethought, would have been a failure altogether.

The flyman had a great opinion of himself. He did not choose to be ranked with the cab-drivers; and so whilst they came to an extempore stand by the kerb of the church entrance, he kept walking his one horse slowly up and down the street, just as though he had been waiting at a palace with steeds covered with gilded buckles and straps. But the instant he saw the beadle come down the steps of the porch, to whack away the boys, and other idlers, he whipped up to the very spot, with a determination and recklessness of consequences that would have made him invaluable going to the drawing-room or coming from the Derby; and there he was, all ready, when Mr. and Mrs. Sprouts—think of that as you scarcely recognize Bessy Payne under her new title; we must give it again—when Mr. and Mrs. Sprouts came out.

Then it was that, heedless of any bolt his horse might make, he twisted down from his box and let down the steps with the loudest possible noise they were capable of making, putting them up again, when the happy couple had entered, with, if anything, increased tumult. He even took the task, in a very violent manner from the hands of the beadle. But he didn't care for the beadle—not a bit. If it had not been Sunday, and any gentleman of sporting habits had been near to back him, he would have fought the beadle for half a crown—staff, scarlet collar and all. For the flyman, mind you, had risen from the ranks of the cab-stands; and he retained all the dogged courage of the class that originally owned him, tempered by the chivalric feeling which constant association with a superior class of society, had imbued him with.

There had been a great many weddings that week. The epidemic had been raging with fearful violence, even in the west, which is at all times the last place attacked by popular disorders; but there was not amongst them all, a more happy single-hearted disinterested match than had been perfected that day—a match that the damp and chill of the world would not affect—that would burn more brightly, the harder the rubs it encountered—that could be “warranted to keep in any climate.”

Of this, both Tom and Bessy were well and honestly assured, when the door was banged to, with an ostentatious ferocity that a second-class porter on a railway would hardly have dared assume, and the fly moved on. But the cabmen were not to be outdone. They made quite as great a noise, if not louder, and would not let the fly get a-head at all, but kept close upon its spikes, determined not to be shaken off. Hickory and Skittler did not keep to the great thorough-

fares, but took artful short cuts, unknown even to the man who had made the last map of London ; so that they arrived at Mr. Chirpey's residence even before the chief company.

In another minute when the procession arrived, they were at the door—apart from the road and shut in by the tall palings and advertising vans—ready to receive Tom and his pretty little wife with a cheer of two—which, for good feeling, might have rivalled in intensity, if not in noise, many a cheer of two thousand—and had put down the steps themselves, caring no more for the man who drove the fly, than if he had been its mere figure-head.

Tom leapt out, with that peculiar freshness which the early poets have attributed to a bridegroom, to offer Bessy his arm. And then they went up the steps with a more novel prospect before them than they had ever before experienced—Brighton and the sea, seen for the first time, and under such delightful circumstances, for Bessy ; and the whole world, in a new aspect, for both !

CHAPTER LIV.

CHRISTOPHER PURSUES HIS ENQUIRIES.

THE next morning, almost before the coffee-room windows had been opened to let out the stale smoke of the night before—which is not a cheering period of the day to view an hotel at, Christopher was on his way to Mr. Samuel Piper's, having availed himself of Bob's company to find out the house. Chester looked as beautiful in the light of the early day, as it had done the evening before at sunset ; and, but for his anxiety, he could have lingered upon the bridge, listening to the roaring water, and looking forth upon the pleasant country, until he had forgotten everything else. But as Bob was also with him, he crossed on to Handbridge, and was not long in arriving at the house he was in quest of.

It was a small cottage up a garden, with a little ditch of running water behind it, which certainly excited surprize when shewn as the stream from which Mr. Piper procured his salmon. For, as Bob had observed, it ran previously by the side of the public way from the high ground ; and as large fish are not often found in fields on the tops of hills, nor on the other hand, are given to leaping up drains and through iron bars, it was wonderful how they got there. Under the eaves of the houses, a great many rods and poles were lying along upon hooks, and these could scarcely have been for fishing in the water in question : nor just at present did there appear anything to catch, except a quantity of minnows, who were wiggling along, all with their heads one way, and making simultaneous darts at any insect or speck of food that the wind blew to them.

Mr. Piper was an aged man, and looked as if, after nature cast

him, he had warped in the drying : for he was bent almost double—probably the result of a long career as a post-boy. He still kept the proper dress of his class, and wore an old, limp, white hat, stuck all over with artificial flies and fish-hooks, some of which, got loose, fluttered about his face, without causing him any uneasiness. When Christopher first saw him, he was nailing up a little mechanical man on a pole, destined to turn about and fight the wind in all directions with two paddles that he carried in his hand : and this appeared to be, in some measure, a sign of one of Mr. Piper's callings, for such a quantity of small windmills, cherry-clacks, and bird-disturbers generally as were perched about upon poles and trees, had never before been seen. The noise they made was quite bewildering.

"Well, old man, how's everything this morning?" enquired Bob, as they approached him.

Mr. Piper was a long time getting up his head to look at them, and an equal period in shading his eyes with his horny, mottled hand : for he led an owlish kind of existence, and sunlight somewhat confused his eyesight ; but in the middle of the night, and near a river or a copse, he could see like a cat.

"How do, Bob?" enquired Mr. Piper. "What's the news?"

"Nothing partiklar," replied the waiter ; "but here's a young gent wants to have a little conversation with you."

Mr. Piper looked at Christopher as much as to say, "And what have you come about?" his first thoughts being that an enquiry was going to be instituted by somebody who had missed some game from his estate.

"I want to know," said Christopher, coming to the relief of his apprehensions, "if you remember bringing a lady and gentleman to the —— Hotel, one wet evening nearly twenty years ago?"

"Why, that's a long time to think on," answered Mr. Piper, looking about as if to find a reply in his weathercocks and cherry-clacks.

"I remember it," said Bob, "and I dare say I can bring you to. Don't you recollect when we dried your wet clothes that we nigh blew up the cook?"

"Lor' bless me," returned the other, as he set down upon a log, "that was the night, sure/y. And I had some powder in my jacket, eh?"

"All right," said Christopher, eagerly ; "Go on."

"Go on where?" asked Mr. Piper, not exactly knowing what he was called upon to explain.

"Where did you come from that evening?" asked the other.

"Well—let me see—that requires a little sort of consideration. 'Twasn't Nortwich, because I hadn't been on that road, curious enough, for ten year together, not in the saddle. But I knew the place well enough. Oh, bless you, yes ; druv there often and often. And it wasn't from Wrexham. Stay a while—stay a while."



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"Perhaps—" observed Christopher.

"Hush!" interrupted Bob; "don't put him out—he's a thinking. He's like the owl you know," he added, dropping his voice to a confidential tone; "don't talk much, but thinks uncommon; and that's why the old lady bought the owl, you recollect, in preference to the parrots. Don't you know the story?"

"No, never mind, now," said Christopher; "wait a minute."

"I've got it," cried Mr. Piper, suddenly. "We come from Flint."

"You are sure?"

"Yes—Flint it was, because I took back a lawyer in the return chay, who lived at Denbigh; and he seemed to know something about it all."

"And his name?" asked Christopher, "do you recollect his name? Was it Gudge—eh?"

"No, that I don't; but he lived at Denbigh," replied Mr. Piper.

Several more questions were put, but the informant's stock of knowledge relating to the subject appeared to be entirely exhausted. So Christopher gave him a trifle, and then returned back to the inn with Bob, to await the next chance of a cart to Dr. Aston's. Market-day favoured him; and that same afternoon he was dining with his old friend. He had a great deal to tell Dr. Aston, and a great deal to hear in return. For he had now many questions to ask, and several of these he was so fond of hearing answered, that he would ask them over a great many times in different shapes. Mr. Mole entered into all the business with as much interest as if it had related to the pedigree of a moth, and was no intrusion. In fact, he could not have been had he wished; for the surgery bell kept up such a chime all dinner time, as if it had been trying to go through all the changes of a triple bob-major by itself—that he got his dinner as he could, which was by fits and starts, but more especially the latter.

Dr. Aston recommended Christopher to follow up the information he had got from Mr. Piper, and go at once to Denbigh, even offering to advance him whatever money he required for the journey. But the lectures had still left a little store in his possession, so he thanked the worthy old gentleman, as he declined to borrow any; and the next morning was again on his way through Chester, rising up betimes, as he wished to get over the distance in one day.

He stopped at one of the inns, at which the coach from Chester put him down, and after a few enquiries of the waiter, started off upon his mission, to which he had at present but a very little clue. But he had found out who was the oldest solicitor in the place, and to him he accordingly went.

The lawyer received him very kindly. He was a mild-looking, grey-headed person, who ought to have been an old English gentleman in a hall, instead of what he was in an office; where the pikes and guns and bows were exchanged for quills and steel pens and red tape; and the swords and good old bucklers that are reported to have stood those good old blows, had turned into deeds and japanned boxes and almanacs of obtruse and painful annual information, every bit of which

was connected with something to be learnt or done before you could pay anybody anything or receive it yourself. To this gentleman, Christopher explained his business as briefly as possible; and was delighted to find that, by chance, he had hit upon the right person.

"Sit down, my dear Sir," said the lawyer, whose name, by the brass plate, was Blandy, "and pray keep your hat on—now do, to oblige me. Let me see—what did you say? about Mr. Gudge—Joshua Gudge, I believe—yes, that's it—very good: my former partner."

"Indeed!" observed Christopher, delighted at the news.

"Yes, my partner; but only for a few months, understand. In fact, we were not partners altogether; he merely waited to introduce me when I came into his practice, and then went to town: at least so I heard."

"Do you recollect anything connected with a marriage of any of his clients under strange circumstances," said Christopher. "A Sir Frederick Arden, or perhaps—" and he hesitated and put the question in a tremulous voice, "or perhaps he was known as Mr. Edwards."

"God bless me! yes, to be sure!" exclaimed Mr. Blandy, all in a breath. "Edwards! Edwards! why, where can I have seen that name! Mr. Fitch! only my clerk, Sir; a very intelligent man. Mr. Fitch—here!"

At the summons Mr. Fitch appeared. He was mild and polite, and wore his nails inky; whilst about his face were various dark smudges, as if he had tried to make himself mustachios with his pen, but failed in the attempt for lack of determination. From absence, or habit, he had stuck a long quill behind each ear, the shafts of which projected like snail's eyes or lobster's feelers in front of his head, and gave him a very investigating appearance.

"Mr. Fitch," said Mr. Blandy, "do you remember, when you were with Mr. Gudge, the name of Edwards amongst your clients?"

Mr. Fitch thought a moment, looking first at the old carpet and then, suddenly, at the ceiling, as though his ideas could be brightened by the rapid transition. And then he answered:

"I think, Sir, that the name was amongst the old bundle of letters we found in the secretary."

"To be sure, so it was, Mr. Fitch," replied his employer, "and they are there now. That will do. I will call when I want you again."

As the clerk withdrew, Mr. Blandy went to an old time-dyed piece of furniture and took out a packet of letters. They were tattered, and flimsy, and had their corners rubbed off. Some were doubled and crumpled as though they had been kept in the pocket; from others the seals crumbled into dingy red dust; and all required care in opening, least they should tear into strips where they had been folded. Important, however, as their contents might have been, they differed little in appearance from the generality of tied-up bygone letters. And with such we are all familiar, for we all hoard them.

Yet it is difficult to tell to what end we keep these old memorials: for their perusal affords, in most cases, but little pleasure. Many

indeed are never looked at again, and yet we could not destroy them without a struggle: others only bring forward evidences of words broken, and hopes chilled, and friendships gradually dissolved—of old attachments turned away, and stubborn contradiction of all the trusting in futurity, whose promise we once clung to. One class of them alone can call up our best feelings. If the almost forgotten memorials of the once dearly-loved and long-departed can carry our sympathies away from the cold hard present over intervening years of struggling and vexatious toil, to that almost holy period of the gone and past—once more, if but for a moment, calling up old thoughts and old affections; or soothing, by one lonely unsuspected burst of tears, overcharged hearts which have long required easing of their burden, there is yet enough—there is more than enough—in these old letters to plead an excuse for so sacredly preserving them.

Mr. Blandy turned over the documents, and at last came to some which, with no small risk to their continuity, he pulled out from the tape which bound them.

"Here we have them," he said. "I was sure Mr. Fitch would recollect all about it. Let me see—ah! ah! um!—this is the one I especially recollect. It is dated from Nantellyn, and relates to—yes—to his marriage."

Christopher scarcely breathed from keen expectation.

"I can call it all to mind now," Mr. Blandy went on, "and I have no doubt we shall come to some information. Here is mention made, distinctly, of the marriage under the name at the parish church—I know it well, a little place almost like a cottage, in the mountains—and the letter is signed Frederick Arden. You should by rights go there and see."

"Is it far?" asked Christopher, eagerly.

"Not so far, but you would soon clear the ground," replied Mr. Blandy, half smiling at his anxiety. "It is about twenty miles from here—a morning's journey for to-morrow."

"Not to-night?" asked Christopher.

"Well, I think not to-night," replied the other: "for we have more papers to look over. Suppose you dine with me to-day; and after dinner we will go over them. For just at this moment, I have one or two persons waiting to see me."

Although not altogether pleased at the delay, Christopher accepted the invitation readily: and going back to the inn at which the coach had put him down, he wrote a letter to Dr. Aston, by the cross post, telling him how he had progressed in his expedition, and then sauntered about the borough until Mr. Blandy's dinner hour.

There was much to amuse him—under other circumstances there would have been a very great deal indeed, but he had other matters to think about. However, he strolled about the ruins of the old castle, and learned from an old gentleman in gaiters and round-toed shoes, with an umbrella—although it was a lovely day—who sat down on a bench beside him by chance, how Earl Lacy of Lincoln who built the castle—the architect having been, for a wonder, neither Julius Cæsar nor the Devil—how this same nobleman walled in an entire village to

form his domain, but losing his son, who tumbled down the castle well by some mistake, went away and never returned again, whereby the castle was never finished. And this romantic information being finished, the communicative old gentleman came to the municipal, and discoursed learnedly of the lighting and paving, the fairs and assizes and especially the borough council, which he appeared to think indirectly ruled England, until Christopher was surprised to find how rapidly the time had passed, even with the half attention and random answers that he had given to his communicative acquaintance.

He returned to Mr. Blandy's at the appointed hour to dinner, and as they were quite alone, for his new friend had been a widower some years—Christopher told the lawyer everything connected with his career. He spoke of his dim recollection of his early days in the salt mine—his subsequent wanderings with Hickory, and his abduction by Sir Frederick Arden before he was sent abroad, all of which raised a strong interest in his behalf.

"You shall go with me early to-morrow morning," said Mr. Blandy, "to Nantellyn; and there we will see if there remains any clue to what is evidently an important mystery. Is Mr. Gudge now in town?"

"I do not know at present," replied Christopher, "but I have a friend who would tell me directly. Do you want him down here?"

"On the contrary," said Mr. Blandy, "I would not have him know what we are about. It is many years now, since I last saw him," he went on. "He was a low pettifogging lawyer in the borough; not particular what he engaged in, and he got his principal business by travelling about from one town to another on market days, and working up the farmers into actions. But it is a trait in your cunning people, that they sometimes outreach themselves; and so at last it happened with Mr. Gudge."

"Did he fail?" enquired Christopher.

"No—not exactly that; but by being too clever he so complicated all his affairs, that he was on the verge of insolvency, when I purchased his practice before it fell to pieces. He still loitered about the neighbourhood, and picked up a few jobs in the neighbouring counties, but our term of agreement prevented him from doing anything here. Suddenly he disappeared. It was said that he married the daughter of an innkeeper on the Holyhead road, and had some property with her. However, he went up to London; and we never saw him in this part of the world again."

Christopher was enabled to take up some of Gudge's history from this point, but there was still an hiatus of some years that he could not supply. He looked forward to the morrow, however, to bring some little more information.

It came, and with it another fine day: and an equally fine journey through scenery that was beautiful even after Switzerland; and at noon they got to the village in question and found out where the clerk lived, who was a mildewed little man, who looked as if he had got mouldy from constantly being in the church, which was also old and small and damp.

It was not a very nice looking church, in any wise. The wet had

come through the roof and made black patches on the groins of the arches, and the windows appeared to have been glazed with flattened wine bottles, and were very dark and gloomy, especially where the ivy half-covered them. Such a collection of noseless, and otherwise harshly treated ladies and gentlemen of the middle ages, as knelt about the monuments you never saw ; and high up the walls were projecting bits of iron on which were put rusty machines said to be helmets, but looking wondrously like dust-hole saucepans, or that class of iron cooking utensils generally found at the bottoms of rivers. There was an old closet in the side of the chancel, which, when the oven-looking door was opened, disclosed a heap of old coffin plates and handles, and rusty nails with shreds of black cloth hanging to them. The charity children called it "Bogy's Hole;" and had an indistinct notion that everybody who died in the parish, wherever they were buried, somehow or another always got there eventually, for the purpose of rushing out and catching hold of the ancles of the last person left in church; and this superstition, especially towards the close of dark afternoon services, had an effect upon their orderly departure, which none of the teachers could prevent.

"This lock won't always open, Sir," said the clerk, as he learned that Mr. Blandy and Christopher wanted to go inside the church, and so accompanied them there from his house.

"Is that the right key?" asked the lawyer, looking at the huge rusty iron instrument, which appeared to have been made for a pantomime a very long time ago.

"Oh! it's the key—but it's just as it takes it. One day we couldn't go through the doorway, so every body was obliged to get in by the window. That other key belongs to the registers; but it don't have much work."

"Indeed!"

"No, Sir—it's such a plaguery obstinate village. Nobody agrees with anybody, and so they never marry: and nobody'll die first, just out of uppishness like. 'No,' they seem to say; 'why should I die before you?' And so they go on, Sir—nothing but pride. Ah! that's it at last!"

The latter words applied to the opening of the door, which—after the key had turned round several times without doing anything, and then resolutely refused to move, and next had been pushed in so far that it nearly tumbled through on the inside—at last yielded: and allowed the party to enter.

"Have you been clerk here long?" asked Mr. Blandy.

"Six-and-thirty year come next Advent," said the old gentleman; "and never missed my place here on Sundays. There are many I have christened, married, and buried, look you; when they did do those things."

"Do you remember," continued Mr. Blandy, looking over one of the old letters for the date; "do you recollect about that time a lady and gentleman named Arden living about here—Arden—or Edwards was it?"

Christopher was trembling with expectation, as the old clerk took a pair of heavy horn spectacles from his pocket, and wiping the glasses with his coat tails, which evidently made them dimmer, put them on and peered over one of the books, as he kept mumbling to himself. At last he said.

"To be sure I do—to be sure I do: and now you mention both the names, I know who you mean. They were married here."

"Married!" cried Christopher.

"Yes—that they were," continued the old man, as he kept turning over the leaves of the register, and making a perfect journey of eyesight from the top to the bottom of the pages.

"They were not when they first came, for the bans were put up as usual whilst they stopped at the inn: but nobody ever said anything against them. There—there's the entry: I knew I should find it."

With a quivering lip, and face perfectly blanched by his emotions, Christopher pushed the old man's hand aside as it pointed to the record, and gazed upon it until his eyeballs smarted with intensity. And then, entirely overcome: as he looked for the first time upon his mother's name—entered as Margaret Ellis—he let his head fall upon the book and burst into a flood of tears, almost hysterical in their violence.

The others were silent. Mr. Blandy put his hand upon his arm and pressed it kindly, but said nothing: and the old clerk was wondering what could have caused the excitement. At last, that he might have a chance of finding out, he went on:—

"They lived here hard upon a twelvemonth, Sir, until the lady was about to become a mother. What was curious, was this. After the marriage, which was in the name of Arden, as you see, the gentleman changed it to Edwards, and by that they went all the time they were here."

"But what did the people think about this?"

"Oh—they supposed it was all right, and didn't trouble their heads about it. Only sometimes—not very often though—letters used to come still directed to Mr. Arden, and now and then with a title, but I really forget now what it was."

"Ask him, Sir," said Christopher to Mr. Blandy, as if unable to put the direct question: "ask him if he knows how or when they left."

"I can't say," replied the old man as he shook his head. "I did hear that at last they were not so happy together. The gentleman would go away for a fortnight or more at a time, leaving the lady here by herself: and it's a dullish place for any one alone. Then the servants said that she used to cry a great deal—especially as the time drew near when she expected her baby to be born."

"And did they visit nobody about here?" asked Mr. Blandy.

"Nobody," returned the clerk. "There was one party used to come now and then—I forget his name: but he was a lawyer because he put all the things down properly on paper for the landlord when our inn was sold; and was paid for it."

"Gudge!" ejaculated both Mr. Blandy and Christopher, simultaneously.

"And then," continued the old man, "one bad day in the beginning of spring they went away. The doctor who had been spoken to about the lady was paid I know just the same: and so was every body else in the village. But we never heard of them again."

"Does your clergyman know any more about it, do you think?" asked Christopher.

"No, Sir: he's a young man—come here ten year after it."

"Nor the medical man?"

"He might, but he didn't stay in the village, for he got nothing to do. Not but what he was a clever gentleman enough, but nobody was ill, and so he left."

"Well," said Mr. Blandy, "I think we have learned enough for one day. I will copy down one or two memoranda, and perhaps you may see us again."

Christopher gave the old man a liberal sum for his attendance, and then left the church with Mr. Blandy, who wished him to return to Denbigh. But he was so extremely anxious to carry back to Dr. Aston all he had learnt: and his brain was bewildered with what he dared and feared to hope at the same time, that he was also glad, if but for ever so short a space, to be by himself. And as it was a nearer way by far to cross the country than return by Chester, he hired a conveyance—the only one the place possessed—to take him, intending to come back forthwith to Mr. Blandy. That good gentleman promised to make fresh enquiries and investigations, now they had got such excellent points to start from; and warmly shaking him by the hand, and telling him that he could scarcely guess what was in store for him, they departed, after the most eventful day of Christopher's life.

That night he was again rattling along the straggling street of the salt town until he stopped at Dr. Aston's door. It was late, but an unexpected present of butterflies from his Chester contemporary had induced the worthy doctor to sit up beyond the usual hour: and Mr. Mole was keeping him company in the lively employment of sending compound powder of chalk—'pulv: cret: comp:': as he called it—through a sieve, for the children who would eat so many plums. So that, to his great joy, Christopher was enabled to tell enough before he went to bed, which he was not desirous of doing, for, in his present state of mind, sleep was out of the question.

CHAPTER LV.

DR. ASTON ACCOMPANIES CHRISTOPHER TO LONDON; AND IS PRESENT AT A LECTURE.

DURING the week that ensued, after Christopher's expedition to Denbigh, he was constantly backwards and forward, on visits to Mr. Blandy, who, having once got certain data, was enabled to compare them with other papers and evidences that he found in his possession, and had soon put the whole business in very good train for his young client to act upon. And then Christopher thought that it would be time enough for him to set off for London.

To his surprise, no less than to his delight, when he mentioned that he was about to depart for the metropolis, Dr. Aston offered to go with him.

"It is several years," he said, "since I have had a holiday, and nearly a quarter of a century since I have seen London. It must have altered very much since I was a student there. Grittles—my good woman—I think of going up to town with Mr. Tadpole."

"Why surely, Master Robert, you're not dreaming of it now," replied the old housekeeper. "I wouldn't, no, not for worlds! To think of having lived so long, and coming to such an end at last."

Here the railway rose before her eyes, along which the roaring engines were now running, as she herself had seen from the window of a house, on a hill a great way off. And she at once conceived that her master was about to start upon a journey as vaguely dangerous as though he had been bound to the end of a vast rocket and fired off, one dark night, into space.

However, the Doctor determined to go. The patients were all seen round, and informed of his intended absence; so that they might not be ill unless it was really unavoidable; and Mr. Mole had orders if anything serious happened to send off an express at once to Chester, for the Doctor's friend, but on no account to call in opposing Mr. Kidge—'the new man' as Mrs. Grittles called him—because it was always dangerous to let another resident practitioner get a footing in a patient's house. The Doctor also made sure that none of his lady patients would require him, at all events for two or three weeks; and so he had his things packed up, and, having seen all smooth, he took his departure with Christopher; whom Mrs. Grittles now regarded as some young demon that had lured him to destruction.

The journey to town was unattended by any remarkable circumstances. Dr. Aston chiefly occupied the time by telling stories of what it used to be, in the days of the old coaches, when he was a student; and descanting upon the entymological or geological features of the counties they traversed. But at last, despite Grittles' prophecy, they arrived safely, and put up for the night at the Golden Cross, Charing Cross. Christopher did not go to bed though. He could not rest

until he had run over to Lambeth to the library, and at all events, got some tidings of his old friends. But he was cruelly disappointed to find Sprouts was from home—albeit he learned the news of the event that had caused his absence; so telling the assistant who was taking care of his shop, that he would be back there the day after the next, by which time he was assured that the happy pair would be “at home,” again, he returned to the hotel.

“I have just called to mind,” said Dr. Aston, as they were at breakfast in the coffee-room, the next morning, “that to-day is the opening of the winter classes at the hospitals; and it will be a very capital time for me to visit my old one. Did you ever see a school of that kind?”

Christopher never had.

“Well—it may amuse you: suppose we go together. The new streets somewhat bewilder me; but I dare say I shall recollect the way.”

So they started off; but the good Doctor required a great deal of care to prevent him from getting into constant difficulties. He pointed at things in the windows with his stick, so close to the glass that passers-by nearly pushed it through; and crossed at inconvenient times, getting in front of omnibuses and amidst conflicting strings of cabs; and also lost his handkerchief. But he eventually got to the hospital, and entered the hall.

It was all changed though. New wings, new wards, and new staircases in all directions; old windows blocked up and fresh doors made—nothing as it used to be, except the portraits in the board-room of long-gone benefactors and founders of its different charities. Even the school was quite new, built up against the windows of the adjoining street from which the Doctor remembered that the poor French refugees used to look down upon the hospital garden, and hang their rushlights out to harden them, that they might burn the longer; or put their ox-tails to keep fresh in the cold, then looked upon as little better than carrion, and sold to them for next to nothing to make into soup, from which circumstances the present preparation originated. The old trees had gone too; and now, fresh ones would not grow in London as they did when the fields came up to the very hospital walls.

The day was, however, more important than of old; and especially to the professors, who were anxiously forming their calculations as to the fresh number of “perpetual” entries: and endeavouring to perceive the effect which their prospectuses, cards, and advertisements had upon the students in general. The visitors were collecting in the theatre, and Dr. Aston took his place, with Christopher at his side; and then the professor who was to give the introductory address came into the theatre amidst loud applause.

“Why—dear me!” said Dr. Aston, “that must be my old friend Bulb!”

And he was right; for the worthy botanist whom Christopher had encountered when he started on his journey stood before them. And looking round he perceived other old acquaintances, Mr. Bowles, who

still appeared to be "going up in about a fortnight," and Mr. Jowlett; and also Mr. Cuff, who was got up at an unusual expense to go and sit in the upstairs part of the Pantheon again, when the lecture was over. Messrs. Rubby and Shorts had got in a corner of the amphitheatre together, intending to play at cribbage behind a paletot, as soon as the lecture began; and last, but very far from being the least important, Mr. Barnes had taken up a prominent position, with somebody else's "Erasmus Wilson" in his hand, which he was banging upon the desk and violently applauding every stranger that entered. But previously to this, he had facetiously stuck a short pipe in the mouth of the skeleton who hung with a balance weight in the theatre, and put a play-bill into his hand, which gave him rather a convivially-disposed appearance than otherwise.

Introductory lectures are not very lively affairs, so we need not report the present one; but as soon as it was over, Dr. Aston went round to the Museum to make himself known to Dr. Bulb; telling Christopher to go into the pupils' room, which was now very nice and clean in honour of the day, where most of the students had assembled.

"Why—you're the lecturer!" said Mr. Barnes, who had got near the fire-place, and was very harmlessly sawing off the corner of the mantelpiece, with a saw that he had found in the dissecting-room. "You remember meeting us out by Finehley, don't you?"

"To be sure I do," said Christopher.

"Of course; come and sit down and join us. You are not going to be a doctor—are you?"

"No, indeed," said Christopher smiling.

"That's well," replied Mr. Barnes; "don't; at least whilst a respectable street-crossing, or an eligible chimney is open to you."

"Is there another lecture to-day, Sir," asked a new man of Mr. Barnes, evidently regarding him as the great authority of the school.

The speaker was a regular country student, just fresh from the surgery and retail of a village apothecary. His face was tanned and chubby, his hair cut very short behind—for new men always have their hair cut very short or very long behind; his cutaway coat was of a bottle green with brass buttons; his hat something between a quaker's and a stage-coachman's; his trowser's dingy drab, without straps; his shirt collar most exuberant; an old fashioned brooch stuck in a long black stock—and you have his picture.

Mr. Barnes looked sideways, and observed with a slightly contemptuous expression.

"Don't 'Sir' me: I'm not used to it at all. My name's Barnes—what's yours?"

"Anthony Simmons," said the new man.

"Very well, Anthony;" replied Mr. Barnes, "now then; what is it?"

"Are there any more lectures to-day?"

"Not unless this gentleman gives you one," said Barnes, pointing to Christopher. "He's a great lecturer," he continued whispering to the new man, "Mr. John Hunter, you've heard of him you know."

And then he went on aloud: "Can you give us a little 'Sports and Pastimes' with the chill off, if you please?"

Christopher laughed at Mr. Barnes's gravity, as well as at the admiration with which the new man regarded him since he had heard his name, of which he had some indistinct notion. He replied he could not call to mind any subject at present.

"Very well," said Mr. Barnes: "I am not proud. I will give a lecture, especially to you, Anthony, and the other new men, to whom I will offer some advice respecting your studies. New men, at the door: either come in or out because there is a confounded draught. Attention."

Whereupon the new men getting a little nervous, and not knowing precisely what to do, came in and closed the door.

"It is customary," observed Mr. Barnes; "for pupils entering upon a course of lectures, to pay for the privilege. Therefore, I hope that none of you will object to send out for a pot of half-and-half. Who is the noble volunteer that will thus walk at once, for the small charge of sixpence, into the esteem of his fellow-pupils? That's right, Anthony: give it to me."

The new man had not an idea of contributing to the fund; but he was so startled by the proposal, that his sixpence was immediately forthcoming. The porter was then despatched for the beer; with orders to bring it back in a basket, for fear that the governors might see it: and Mr. Barnes commenced:

"Gentlemen; I hold in my hand a card very nicely printed, with a border round it of ornamental design, and a bird with a long tail at each of the corners. It contains the names of the lecturers; and the names, weights, and colours—no, that's wrong—the names, hours, and terms of the lecture. And now I will tell you what to attend to. Hem! Gentlemen: I would have you follow these sciences at your ease—at dinner and supper, when the anatomical examination of a nicely done chop, or a broiled kidney will be found, if anything, rather agreeable than otherwise. Lecturers will favour you with a sight of a gold fish's tail through a microscope to show you the circulation. As there are fifty to see this spectacle, and as it is more than probable that the fish dies beneath the glance of the fifth spectator you will not learn much from this. But tell the lecturer you see the globules plainly—a thing I never did, but never mind—and then he will sign your certificates 'very diligently.' You will be shewn also something in the brains called a *hippocampus major*, which is as much like a sea-horse as it's like a Welch rabbit. But all this is really of no use. Therefore, remember—stop a minute—here's the porter with the beer."

As Mr. Barnes spoke, the porter of the hospital entered with a covered hand-basket, from which he produced a quart pot, and handed it to the lecturer; who, having taken what he called 'a moderate quencher' continued:—"Gentlemen: your whole career, meeting, as it does, the vestiges of creation applied to the reasoning faculties in the pursuit of science, under difficulties that the mighty mind of Time alone subdued to popular improvements in the already over-

crowded thoroughfares of mental and social discrepancy: returning—I said returning—Anthony! what the devil did I say?"

At this Mr. Barnes turned round so sharply to the new man that he was quite startled.

"I—really:" he stammered, "I'm very sorry, but I don't know."

"Because, sir," said Mr. Barnes severely, "you have not been attending. How can you hope to prosper in a profession, to perfect you in which, your friends are, no doubt, depriving themselves of many comforts—eating hares without jelly, drinking raisin instead of port, and burning muttons instead of moulds! And this is the return you make for such denial? For shame, Anthony!"

The new man was quite touched at Mr. Barnes's pathos.

"Now, Sir, remember if you can," continued Mr. Barnes, sternly, "never again to insult so grossly, one who's only aim can be to improve your almost utterly extinguished intellects."

The old pupils could stand it no longer: they had kept the best faces they could during the exordium of Mr. Barnes, but now they all burst out into a shout of laughter, as the new man, not clearly understanding what it was all about, but believing that somehow or another he had been guilty of very gross misconduct, hoped Mr. Barnes wouldn't think any more about it, in a most humble and polite manner. Just at this moment, Dr. Aston, who had finished his talk with his old friend, put his head in at the door to look after Christopher.

"How do you find yourself by this time, Sir?" enquired the ever-vigilant Mr. Barnes, as he saw the good Doctor's features: not, however, having any recollection of having ever seen them before, or, indeed, knowing what previous state of general health he had been in, but speaking with that *bonhomie* which characterized all his actions.

"Come in, Sir," he went on, as the Doctor retreated a step, thinking, at the instant, that there was some mistake. "What can we do for you, Sir? We're ready for anything—from taking up a bill, to taking up an artery. Nice amputation, Sir—cheap and in good cut, if you want to get rid of any of your limbs. Like to be trephined, Sir?—do it considerably under prime cost. Any teeth?"

But by this time, Dr. Aston saw that he was right, and he came into the pupils' room, closely followed by Dr. Bulb, to the great consternation of the new men, who believed that their prospects in life were now blighted for ever.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon," said Mr. Barnes: "I thought you were students: didn't you, Anthony?"

But the others were too frightened to reply.

"So we are, gentlemen," replied Dr. Aston, smiling; "so we are all—still students, learning something fresh every day. You will find when you are my age that you will be a student just the same."

Mr. Barnes inwardly disbelieved the assertion, but did not say so. However, to turn the conversation, he presented Christopher to Dr.

Bulb, and brought to his recollection how they had met in the botanical excursion. This opened a fresh field of talk, during which the rest of the pupils shirked out of the room, for fear of incurring the displeasure of the Professor. Mr. Barnes alone remained, not particularly caring about it: for, to do him justice, in spite of all his noise and wild habits, he was a favourite with all the inmates of the Hospital, from the physicians and surgeons, to the nurses.

"I think you have met a man of my acquaintance in a row," said Mr. Barnes to Christopher; "in which he behaved very badly, and I told him so. Don't you know Sir Frederick Arden?"

Christopher started at the name, thus suddenly alluded to. And then he enquired in turn:—

"Do you know him? Where is he just at present?"

"Oh—you have not heard then. Never mind. I ought not to have said anything about it."

"What do you mean?" asked the other. "Of course I shall not mention it again."

"No, no," said Mr. Barnes: "I can't. 'Pon my honour I told him I would not, until I had his leave. But it's all right; you shall know as soon as anybody, really, if you want to."

"But you can tell me where he is." Christopher went on.

"Well, I may do that. I suppose he is at his place down in the country by this time. What do they call it—Arden Court I think. I'm a coming."

The last words were addressed to one of his fellow-pupils who, appearing to desire his presence, called him through the just-opened door. Upon which Mr. Barnes, not taking Christopher's anxiety to know more about the young Baronet's affairs into consideration, but begging to be excused, shook his hand, told him that they should always be happy to see him at the school, and rushed off to join his friends.

Dr. Aston then wished the old contemporary good bye, and left the hospital, to go to the Polytechnic Exhibition, which he was convinced, with his crotchets, would prove a perfect paradise to him, from which he should never wish to come away.

But Christopher had other employment on hand. He first went to Mr. Blandy's London agent—a gentleman who practised as a solicitor in one of the streets running out of the Strand, to whom the other had written a detailed account of the case, coupled with the request that he would immediately communicate with Mr. Gudge thereupon.

Upon enquiry, he found that Mr. Gudge had been staying with his wife at Arden Court for some little time; and Christopher, having learned that the young Baronet was there also, decided at once upon proceeding there.

The lawyer expressed himself ready to accompany him; and, therefore, having returned to the Golden Cross and left a hurried note for Dr. Aston, he made arrangements to start off by one of the evening trains, and then go across the country, as he could, from the station nearest to Arden Court.

CHAPTER LVI.

GREAT EXCITEMENT AT ARDEN COURT.

WINTER was falling upon the old country-house to which we have before alluded. The last acorns had tumbled from the oaks; and the beeches had showered down their crisp dry leaves upon the grass below, now only rearing their skeleton branches to the leaden sky, like the pictures of blood-vessels in works of anatomy, turned over by chance upon the book-stalls.

All the verdure, indeed, had disappeared. Where the eye had rested upon a waving expanse of foliage, there was now nothing to be seen but a dull brown belt: the birds' nests stood out like blots in the naked hedges, and the evergreens—never very lively adjuncts to a woody landscape—appeared doubly gloomy in their loneliness. The ground was cold and soddened with wet: pools of water collected in hollows of the park, and even in the very furrows of the fallow land: hills that in the summer-tide had risen in clear and sharp outline against the bright horizon, were no longer visible in the fog; and the wind howled about the unsheltered copses, as if singing dreary requiems for the autumn life that had departed. The pleasant green lanes turned into impassable sloughs; and the shrubberies that had been so dark and fragrant in the summer-tide, were choked up with rotting leaves, upon which the condensed mist, or remnants of the last rain, kept up a melancholy and unceasing drip, which stole underneath the top layer to settle, beyond hope of evaporation, in the mass that hid the paths.

It was better within the house. For there the dry logs, left an entire year in the sheds, blazed upon the iron dogs, as the flames leapt up the chimney; and, on a dark night, a person looking at the roof without, might have seen such volleys of sparks at every point whirling away upon the wind, as might have led him to believe that the whole fabric would soon burst out in flame. Woe betide it, if such had been the case, with its floors, and wainscots, and splintering rafters; and not more water at hand than would have put out a November bonfire, except at the bottom of a deep well in the court; which, however it might have been, from its locality, allowed to be a truth, took a great time to be proved the fact. Pebbles thrown in they were almost forgotten before the hollow 'chink' proved that they had touched the surface; and frogs brought up at times in the buckets, betrayed as great astonishment at the new world they had suddenly arrived in, as though they had just emerged from a long tranquil doze in the centre of a block of marble.

In the room, to which we have before introduced you, Lady Arden was sitting, one cold night, with her face leaning against the cushions of the large old-fashioned sofa. As before, the table was covered with papers, and yellow stubborn-looking deeds, one of which she held in her hand, together with her handkerchief; and her pale face and red eyelids shewed that she had been crying.

A servant answered to a summons she had been ringing.

"Did those people—" and here she checked herself. "Did Mr. and Mrs. Gudge leave any word about when they should be back to-night?"

"No, my Lady," replied the man; "but he said it might be rather late, and that we were not to go to bed."

"That will do," said Lady Arden, almost shuddering as she spoke; "let me know as soon as they return."

And the man left the room.

An hour passed on; and then the sound of wheels was heard; and the deep hoarse bell rang in the court. Lady Arden started at the sound; and was about to retire, when, before she could gather the different papers together, Gudge and his wife entered, but so wrapped up, that at first one could scarcely have recognized them.

"We've come back you see, my Lady," said Gudge; "all right—eh? Ah! the fire looks cheering, don't it?"

"Such a dreadful night!" observed Mrs. Gudge, "and the rum-brella first turned inside out and then blew away altogether from the stick. My bonnet's all of a squelch."

"I see you've had enough to amuse you while we've been away," said Gudge speaking as if he had got a rusty windpipe, and glancing at the papers. "We've got on capitally at the farmer's, and nailed him for all his law business. Nothing like being on good terms with your neighbours, is there?"

He said this in a husky, half indistinct manner that showed he had been drinking deeply; and he wavered backwards and forwards upon his feet so unsteadily, that Lady Arden was glad when he caught hold of the end of the sofa for support.

"My dear," he went on, speaking to Mrs. Gudge, "what's o'clock? Never mind—I don't want to know, but it's quite time you went to bed. I've got to talk to Lady Arden."

"Nonsense G., I must dry myself. Look here—I'm as if I'd been dip'd in a river."

"Go to bed!" he added sharply. "Am I master here or are you? Go to bed!"

He roared out the last words with such ferocity that his better half caught up a candle, and left the room.

"That's the way to manage 'em, my Lady," he continued speaking to Lady Arden as Mrs. Gudge's retreating footsteps were heard along the hall. "That's the way to manage 'em; it's the eye does it—all the eye."

"Will you not sit down, Sir?" asked Lady Arden coldly, pointing to a chair.

"Sit down, Lady A., and in your presence—no—never! If you had been Mrs. Gudge, I should never have sat down at all. Mrs. Gudge is a fine woman—though I say it that ought not to say it—but she's nothing to you—not that!" and he snapped his fingers, "you're after my taste regularly."

"Keep off—Sir! you are intoxicated!" cried Lady Arden, terrified at his audacity, as she shrunk back, perceiving that Gudge made a lurch towards her.

"No—don't say so, ma'am ; I mean, my Lady—not intoxicated except by your beauty. I—that is—you know I mean that—"

As he was entangling himself in a mesh of words, Lady Arden flew to the fire-place and pulled the bell rope so violently that it gave way. Almost at the very same instant, the court bell again sounded ; and the attention of Gudge was diverted.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Who can that be so late at night. Eh? I didn't expect anybody, and it's in nobody's way anywhere? Did you, my Lady?"

He blundered to the bay window and looked out. The lights from the other parts of the house gleamed into the court and he was enabled to make out the objects.

"Why—what's this?" he exclaimed, believing he was speaking to Lady Arden ; but she had left the room. "What's this? A London cab down here. Oh! nonsense; trash—humbbug!"

And contradicting himself, as he was in the habit of snapping at other people, he backed away from the window.

There was bustle, however, in the hall. The servants were there, and had opened the large door as Lady Arden came to them : and then a well-known voice was heard to say :

"Here—some of you : come here! How much longer do you mean to keep me waiting?"

"Frederick!" cried Lady Arden, pressing forward to the door.

"Yes, mother ; it's all right," replied the young Baronet, getting out. "Astonished to see me so late, I dare say. I didn't expect to find anybody up. Stop a minute—I've got a visitor."

And to the utter surprize of his mother, he pulled, rather than assisted, Fanny Hamper from the cab, and led her into the porch amidst the wonder of the servants.

"Good Heavens! Frederick ; what does this mean?" asked Lady Arden, as soon as she found breath to speak.

"Mean, mother? That is a good one! What should it? It means that young lady may call you the same name as I do—before long."

Fanny Hamper who had been waiting to see how she would be received, in order that she might adopt the affectionate or trembling style of meeting Frederick's mother, took advantage of the bewildered lady's confusion, and said :

"I hope you will hear me, Lady Arden, before you oppose a step which must appear so extraordinary."

"Extraordinary indeed, Miss Hamper."

"Heyday! what the devil's going on now," said Gudge, as he came from the drawing-room into the hall. "Is there to be anybody with a voice here, at all. Who's there?"

"Do you want to know?" cried Sir Frederick rushing up to him, with every evident disposition to shew him practically.

"What! Sir Frederick?" exclaimed Gudge.

"Yes—Sir Frederick," replied the other mimicking. "And what have you got to say to Sir Frederick? And what do you want here?"

"What do I want; oh, of course—nothing," replied Gudge, "nothing."

"Well then we don't sell it—so try another shop;" said the young Baronet.

"Frederick! what does all this mean?" asked Lady Arden; "come to my room, and—and bring this young person with you—anywhere but here."

"Don't call her a 'person,' mother," cried Sir Frederick; "or perhaps you may be sorry you ever did so. Fanny—go with the maid there. I'll put all these people to rights. Now—what do you want?"

These words were addressed to one of the servants who came forward.

"If you please, Sir Frederick," said the man: "the cab-driver's waiting to be paid."

"Oh—aye—yes: stop a minute, I've got no change. Never mind; tell him to put up for the night at the Arden Arms; he must wait somewhere; the horse can't go a mile further unless he was put inside."

"This intrusion requires some explanation," observed Gudge as he came forward from the bystanders.

"Why—you damn'd pettifogging miscreant!" cried Sir Frederick, "a reptile that hasn't got any right to own even his own life—what do you mean? What do you mean, Sir?"

As he repeated the words violently and ferociously, he seized hold of Gudge's neckcloth, which was tied in a miserable close juggling-looking knot, about his throat, and twisted it round until the attorney's eyes started from their sockets. In vain Lady Arden implored him to desist. The young Baronet was evidently as much excited as the lawyer, and now that he had once felt the pleasure of insulting him, like a tiger tasting blood, he went on with redoubled energy. He swung him round and round like a child; and then, taking his other hand to his assistance, beat Gudge's head against the wainscot until it was almost cracked. And when he was quite out of breath, he flung him away with such force, that the lawyer spun round for several feet and then fell heavily upon the floor.

"Now get up," said Sir Frederick to him; "and I'll serve you so again."

"You shall repent this," cried Gudge as soon as he could speak, raising himself upon one elbow, but not more than that for fear the other should carry his threat into execution.

"Pshaw!" cried Sir Frederick. "Lie down!" and he spoke the words, as though Gudge had been a dog.

"And you have permitted this, madam," continued the other, now talking to Lady Arden; "with all these servants round who, who could, collectively have prevented it. This has settled the question. You shall see whether or not, I am 'intoxicated.' Can I get up free from further injury?"

"Let me entreat you, Frederick—for most important reasons—to restrain your temper for a few minutes!"

"A few minutes!" cried Gudge; "no, altogether, or here I stay—until somebody goes for a constable—and leave all reasons altogether out of the question."

"If you're afraid to move," continued Sir Frederick to the servants; "you can at least go on an errand. West—run down to the Arden Arms and fetch that cabman back again, and if the ostler's there, ask

him to come as well. I've often wanted to see whether you could swim or not," he went on addressing Gudge, "and now here's a nice cold night for the horse-pond to try it."

He had scarcely finished speaking, when Gudge, who had been apparently collecting all his courage, jumped upon his legs and cried out:—

"Sir Frederick Arden, I warn you for the last time to take care of what you are doing. It's very dangerous work, Sir, to attack a lawyer—very dangerous indeed. You don't know how far *you* can go, with legal safety, in an affair of this kind, but *I* do!"

"Leave the house, you miserable sneaking hound!"

With astonishing courage, which appeared to have come at the moment, Gudge leant back against the billiard-table, and exclaimed, as firmly as he was able:—"I shall not, Sir: I shall stay here as long as I like. For ever if I please."

—Lady Arden had expected, from Frederick's kindling eye and flushed face, what would be the return to this speech of Gudge's. She stepped forward to seize her boy's arm; but, before she could arrest him, he flew at Gudge like a tiger. Seizing him again by the throat with his left hand, he dealt him such a shower of blows with his other fist, about the head and face, that the wretched attorney was in an instant covered with blood, the result of the training his young opponent had undergone under the tuition of Mr. Nick Mawley. Nor did he stop until, at the command of his mother, the two servants stepped in and parted them.

"Get me a basin," cried Gudge, as soon as he could speak; "get me a basin, and some water, and a sponge!"

"Get him a coffin," replied Sir Frederick, "for I mean him to want one before I've finished with him." And he appeared about to repeat the punishment; when one of the servants interposed.

"What do you mean, West?" cried the young Baronet. "How dare you stand in my way?"

"Because he knows his true master," said Gudge, as he wiped his face with a flaring red silk handkerchief. "Because he knows that you have no more hold over Arden Court than he has; and thinks it will be as well to keep friends with the man in power. Now, Sir Frederick, what do you think of *that*?"

"Pooh! Stuff!" answered the Baronet, struck at the moment by what Gudge said, and yet not wishing to believe him. "Hold your tongue!"

"I will not, Sir Frederick!" Gudge went on, perfectly screaming with rage and excitement.

"Mr. Gudge!" exclaimed Lady Arden, appealing to him.

"Madam!" he replied, "I will speak; and before them all. I tell you, Sir Frederick, you have at present no more right to command here than your servants. The property is in my hands, and you can't touch it, if your life depended on it. I've a bill against you that will make you tremble; and you can't touch even the very money that is to pay it, without I please. Now who's the 'miserable sneaking hound'?—now who's lord and master of Arden Court? Do you see that lady there—your mother? Say but another word, and I can throw her into prison. Lift even your finger against me, and it's done."

And, having thus poured out his fury, he turned to the servant who brought the basin and water, and began to make a flurried toilet.

Sir Frederick Arden, who had been, during the speech, grasping a billiard cue with a restless clutch, as though he meant it every instant to descend upon the head of his enemy, when the other came to an end, turned round to his mother and hurriedly demanded an explanation.

"I was in hopes that I should have been spared this humiliation," she answered, falteringly; "but I fear it is too true. Frederick, you cannot tell what I have undergone in these last few days. My heart is broken!"

And whilst she was yet speaking, she burst into a violent flood of tears.

There are few natures—however wild and dissolute—however blunted and insensible—that have not some good points to set off against their general want of sympathy.

Sir Frederick was touched to see his mother thus suffering; and perceiving that her chief grief appeared to be in the *exposé* of the state of their affairs before the servants, he directly took her hand and led her into the drawing-room, closing the door after them, and even locking it.

"And now, mother, tell me: what does all this mean?" he asked, as soon as they were alone.

"It means all that that man has said, Frederick. I cannot follow the chicanery by which he has taken advantage of us, but he gradually appears,—having started first from your poor father's will, and the trusts reposed in him—to be getting everything into his possession. In a word it seems that we are ruined."

"But—ruined, mother! what do you mean? I suppose this beast cannot put all the Court, with its park and timber into his pocket, or lock it up in his cash-box."

"No, Frederick; but he can keep us from touching a farthing of the produce. I have gone over these papers until my brain has turned again, and without seeing anything to better us. He came down with his wife to stay here—perfectly uninvited, but they forced themselves on me—two or three days ago; and he has since acted precisely as if he had been at home. But now tell me—for during this terrible scene I have forgotten everything—what daring folly have you committed in bringing that girl here?"

"Now—don't scream, mother," he replied in an off-hand manner; "nor, as I said before don't call her names, because it is not proper. You are now the Dowager Lady Arden."

"For Heaven's sake, explain yourself, Frederick?" said Lady Arden; "What do you mean?"

"Nothing more than I say," he continued, coolly poking the logs of wood together that were burning on the dogs of the hearth with the heel of his boot. "I have been properly married to Miss Hamper, and we have come here to spend the honeymoon. It has all been done on the square."

"The what?" enquired Lady Arden, thunderstruck at the intelligence.

"The square you know. It's no cross—a fair match. 'Pshaw'!—I forgot: you know nothing about it. However, the friends have been written to, and the forgiveness implored, and all that sort of thing. And it's not such a bad affair after all. She has got money."

He said these last words in a lower tone, as though he feared the walls might actually have those ears popularly assigned to them.

"I think you might go and speak to her," he continued. "It has been a curious scene to welcome a bride home. And we came in a curious way too; only the money ran short; and I did not know whether there would be any handy if we posted. That cab brought us right down here to-day. Now go to her mother; and mind—be kind to her: for recollect, she's your daughter, now. I didn't tell you so at first before them all; but here"—and he searched in his pocket—"no: stop a minute that's a playbill: and that's—oh—a copy of a writ—well thank my stars I can plead minority—there; there's the certificate. Look at it; it's all correct."

His mother's nerves had been so unstrung by the events of the evening that she was glad of any excuse to get back to her own room, to which her maid had conducted the young lady. As she went through the hall, she found that even in this brief interim, Gudge had taken his departure to his chamber; and the servants had closed up the Court for the night. So that soon, the only lights that shone forth upon the ivy that bordered the casements, and though the straggling and bare branches of the creeper that clung about them, came from the upper windows; and some of these gleamed, until the night was far advanced, flitting from one room to another, and showing that some of the inmates were anything but settled.

But if the Court was in this state of excitement, the little village that surrounded the Arden Arms was still more flurried that evening. The arrival of a London cab had been sufficient, in itself, to have served the entire population with subject matter for conversation, for the next week; and the driver was received, as though he had been a most distinguished foreigner at a royal court.

And when—at an hour of the evening that the oldest inhabitant of the hamlet had never heard strike, except when lying awake in bed, and to which point of time the cab-driver's extraordinary abilities and convivial habits had kept the usual frequenters of the Arden Arms from their homes—when, in addition to this excitement, the helper at the hostel came in suddenly and said that a post-chaise and four,—with steaming horses and gleaming lamps—had got one of its wheels smashed all to bits against the post of the gate that enclosed the common over which the road ran in grazing time—then it was that the sudden descent of the clouds would have been regarded as an occurrence to be looked at with contempt by the side of such marvels.

But so it was: and the next instant, the cab-driver's last wonderful feat and knowing anecdote were forgotten, as the company turned out into the lane to see of what use they could be to the travellers; as well as to have a stare at the reported accident.

CHAPTER LVII.

MR. GUDGE SUDDENLY DEPARTS UPON AN UNCERTAIN ERRAND.

AFTER a hurried dinner in the coffee-room of the Golden Cross—ordered rather for the good of the house than his own—Christopher prepared to start, with his companion, to Arden Court.

But his astonishment was very great, almost matching his delight, when upon entering the dusty office in the street running out of the Strand, he encountered no less a person than Mr. Blandy.

"I dare say you are surprised to see me," said the good gentleman; "but I could not stay at home a minute longer. I found, after you went, so much more information about your affairs, and such a number of papers, that I got here as soon as I could. What are you going to do?"

Christopher explained that it was his intention to set off at once to Arden Court.

"The very thing I was going to propose, if our friend here had not given me a hint about the matter. If Gudge is there we cannot have a better opportunity than the present; so—I am your man."

They were soon ready, and rattling in a cab towards the railway terminus, where the steam from many impatient engines was gleaming in the gas-lights. At the station all was bustle for the mail-train. The passengers were crowding up to the apertures by which the clerks are so strongly fortified; and the clerks themselves were jamming the tickets into those wonderful machines between coffee-pots and nut-crackers, over which they hold unlimited control, and distributing them as fast as their pair of arms could do it.

Mr. Blandy took second class tickets, which he always made a point of doing, saying that they would get there quite as soon as the others. And beyond the knowledge of the fact, he was learned in railway travelling; and preferred the second class for various reasons.

For although comfortable enough, he was wont to remark, there is little sociability in a first class carriage on a railway. Everybody seems to have an idea that he is the only one who is really entitled, by payment and position, to a seat therein: and so is afraid of compromising his dignity by speaking. There is consequently no conversation: the heads of the four corner occupants are usually looking out of the windows by day, or leaning against them by night; and the centre ones look at one another. By the same rule, however, that you rarely see a pretty woman in an omnibus, so, somehow or other, you scarcely ever meet with ordinary ones in a first class carriage. And this fact Mr. Blandy would also insist upon.

The second class travellers are all deep fellows. They come early to get a back seat—or at all events to sit with their back to the engine. They will watch the weathercocks well, and make their selection of place according to the wind. In warm weather they are chatty and communicative enough, since many of them are in the habit of

meeting every day in the train ; and they are given to faceté observations, which end in drawing parallels between the engine and a horse ; except perhaps on Monday afternoons, when the talk is purely agricultural, and about the state of the fields on the side of the line, carried on by farmers returning from Mark Lane. But in cold weather they talk but little. They insist upon closing all the windows to suffocation ; and after a few exchanged courtesies—taking their parcels out of each other's way, or spreading a cloak over two or three pairs of knees, they are heard of no more.

As for the rattling open pig-pens upon wheels, which were formerly surnamed third class carriages, Mr. Blandy only looked upon them as wonderful machines, possessing the property of always meeting the rain, no matter from what quarter the wind might be blowing—horizontal shower baths, from whose searching power there was no escape. A wet steaming dripping coach used to be a melancholy object enough, swaying through a village with its compact hood of umbrellas, looking for all the world like a large green tortoise lying over the top : but it was nothing in forlorn appearance to an open car. There was no escaping the rain. If you turned your back to it, it filled the nape of your neck ; if you faced it, you had overflowing pockets, with an additional cataract from the front rim of your hat, which before long was as limp as wet brown paper. Some rash people used to cover their heads with their handkerchiefs, but it came all the same : it was only prolonging the misery, as you did not know next where to put your handkerchief when you removed it. Everything was ruined, from your health downwards.

The bell rang : the door slammed : the last evening newspaper was sold to some sanguine person who expected to be able to read it by the light of the illuminated finger-glasses in the roof of the carriages, and the train moved off—a few friends walking by the side of the carriages, smiling and nodding, to the end of the platform, and then having, for the hundredth time, said “ You'll write soon, wont you ? ” retiring.

Nobody of any singularity travelled with them, except an old lady, of the family you always meet in second class carriages. They had first found her in great distress about a box, as one of the omnibuses came up to the door—a box unlike any ever seen before. Then, being found, it was a source of the deepest trouble to her on arriving at the train, because it would not go into any locker or under any of the seats ; and it was finally put into a remote van, where the old lady would liked to have gone as well, to be near it, had she not been so nervous. Like Mrs. Grittles, and old ladies generally, her ideas of steam-power were very limited. She looked upon the engine as something between clock-work and gunpowder, which kept her in perpetual dread : and whenever they met a train, she gave herself up for lost. Indeed on these occasions her agony was terrible to witness, and some time always elapsed before Mr. Blandy could assure her that some dreadful accident had not happened, and that nobody was crushed. At every stoppage she made great confusion by having the window

down (which stuck as fast as second-class windows do generally), and inquiring of the local policeman or attendant time-keeper if the box was safe: or else she looked sharply after every passenger that got out, for fear he, or she, should walk off with it. And when finally she reached her destination, she so nearly shut herself in by her own umbrella, which she got in some marvellously inextricable manner across the door, that she was all but carried away from her box, after all.

Christopher, Mr. Blandy, and the agent, alighted at the next station: and immediately went to the first inn to procure some means of conveyance to Arden Court. It was a new building, run up upon the speculation of the traffic that there might be, at some future time, when the adjacent common had become a peopled and flourishing town. Everything had been provided against such a period. There was a blue board, with letters that absolutely dazzled by their brightness, running all across the hotel and flauntingly blazoning forth the names of the brewers whose "entire" was retailed on the premises. There were also announcements of beds, and lock-up coach-houses and post-horses; and there was too a coffee-room, on the tables of which a waiter regularly laid a number of cloths every day to entice travellers, and as regularly folded them all up again at night, nobody having come. For there was a chillness about the coffee-room that made people shiver, even in the dog-days. It was just the sort of place at which, you knew by foresight, that if you had ordered mutton chops, there would have been great delay and confusion, and over the blind you would have seen the pot-boy run to the butchers; and the waiter would have brought you musty pale ale, and the pickles would have been confined to cabbage, if indeed you got that: and finally, you would have been strenuously recommended to try eggs and bacon, and perchance have been compelled to do it.

As Christopher and his companions walked over the loose gravel and broken bottles that formed the new road, over what a year ago had been a furze field, the landlord rang an imposing bell—which was in the habit of frightening procrastinating travellers into an idea that the up-train was off—and answered it himself by coming to the door: for the waiter had left that day, to better himself.

"Can we have a chaise and horses to Arden Court?" asked Christopher.

"Yes sir—directly sir," said the landlord.

And he rang the same bell very violently, again, to get up a little excitement; but this time nobody answered it.

"Please to walk into the bar gentlemen," he said. He had not expected anybody else that night, and the fire had long gone out in the coffee-room. The guests went into the bar, to the discomfiture of the landlady who was mending socks, and the wife of the man at the station who had brought her work for the evening, whilst the landlord ran round to the stables.

"Tom," said he to the man who was assisting in the absence of the

ostler, who usually drove strangers from the station to wild districts adjoining. "Tom—is the fly come back?"

"No—that it taint," replied the man: "nor won't be for an hour. It's gone to Broomfield Ridges."

"Then there is nothing but the old landau in the coach-house."

"No, except the old fire-engin."

"Well," said the landlord, "we must have that out then."

"What! th' ingin, sir?"

"No; no; the landau. And put old Bess and the long-back'd 'un into it."

"They'll never pull that old landau across the common—that they won't," replied Tom. "There's holes there as deep as the gravel-pits. It 'ud be as much as four could do."

"Can we get four?" asked the landlord. "Stop! borrow the two old mares from the station, that pull the extra carriages up from the sheds on Sunday nights. Now look sharp: we've old harness enough for a dozen, and I'll go back to the gents that want them."

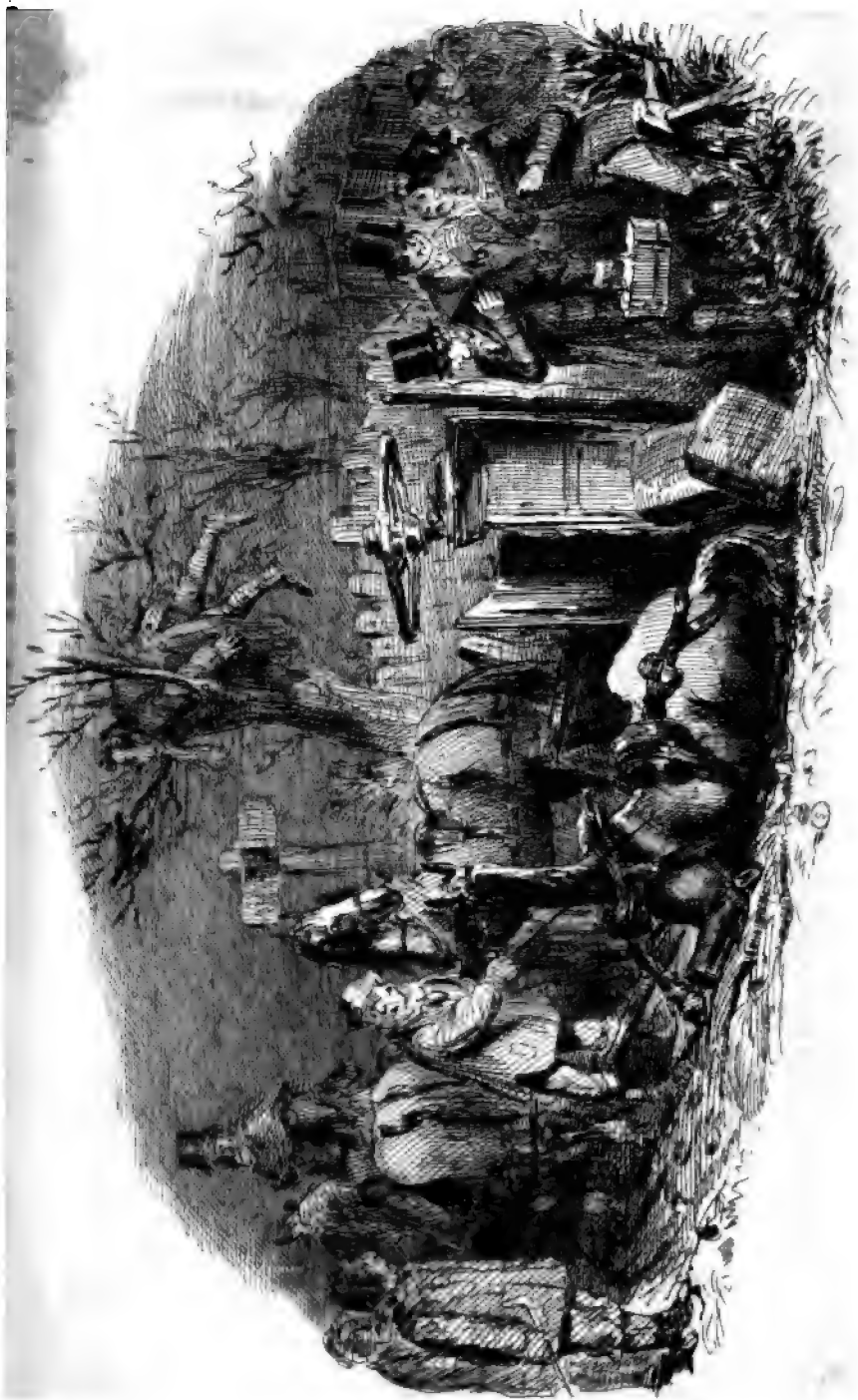
The man did as he was ordered, whilst the landlord returned, and asked them if they would not have anything, to carry on time. Fortunately for him, Mr. Blandy was so cold that he ordered some brandy and water; and Christopher helped him to finish it: which done, they went to hurry on the preparations.

"I am sorry to make you have four horses, gents," said the landlord: "but the common is so heavy just now that it would almost take a team to pull a gig across it. In fact, it's very dangerous, so I'm going with you myself."

As there was nobody else available but Tom, this was as well; and as there was only one saddle, in addition, the landlord mounted the box when, after some delay, the vehicle came round to the door. Christopher, Mr. Blandy and the agent then got in; and by some extraordinary combination of reins, bridles, girths and traces, which would have puzzled a French postilion to have used, the horses went off at last, one after another, and pulled the old landau with them.

They had to cross the line on a level; and the first thing the horses did, being used to the rails, was to run along them towards the station, from which position they were not cleared until the fire of the last up-train could be seen advancing under a distant bridge. Then they went into unintended foot-paths; and sometimes shied and got entangled, all of a heap, as the horses in a child's toy waggon do, when the impatient owner pushes it behind faster than his friend draws it before. And at last, after having been whipped into a medley gallop, they pulled the landau against an unseen post at the edge of the road, and one of the wheels shivered, like touchwood, in a minute.

As the carriage went over on one side, the travellers contrived to tumble out unhurt: and the agent directly ran forward to the village, which was now close at hand, to procure assistance. The news of the accident, as we have seen, was directly told in the traveller's room; and it was forthwith empty, even to the cab-driver whose last story had been cut rudely short.





"Nobody is hurt—thank you," said Mr. Blandy, as the crowd pressed round him: "but the carriage is crippled."

"Halloo—help me down!" cried a voice, apparently from the air.

As the fellows looked round, they saw the landlord wedged into a pollard willow, where he had been jerked by the shock, and totally unable to extricate himself. However, by their united efforts, he was placed in safety on the ground, and then the horses were freed from the carriage, and Tom led two of them, whilst another man ran on to the wheelwrights, to knock him up and see if he had a spare wheel to run the old landau on up to the village.

"We want to go to Arden Court," said Christopher as they reached the inn. "How can we get there?"

"I don't see any way to-night sir," said the man addressed. "The park's shut up by this time, and you'd have to go round by the river. It isn't a very safe road after dark."

"We'll risk that," said Christopher, "what conveyance have you got?"

"Ah! that's it," continued the other, scratching his head. "We haven't nothing just now, except that London cab, and his horse is dead beat."

"Well—what's to be done?"

It was not a question very easily answered. At last, however, they determined upon stopping at the Arden Arms that night, putting up with such accommodation as the public-house afforded; and going on in the morning. A little delay occurred in getting the rooms in order for them; and then they retired, whilst the general company returned to the kitchen to finish the evening.

They were up and about early the next morning; and after breakfast started off on foot to Arden Court, as Mr. Blandy wished to put several questions to the cottagers as he went along. This took some time, and although it was close upon noon when they got there, the family had scarcely all left their rooms, after the harrassing excitement of the previous night. So the trio were shewn into the library, where they sat some time, until Lady Arden made her appearance—pale and worn from the late riot.

The interview was a long, and to her a very painful, one. Mr. Blandy knew the distressing nature of the communications he had to make, and spoke with all gentleness and compassion; whilst Christopher sat in silence, with his eyes fixed upon the lady with an intense gaze, that at last, grew oppressive to himself. But the interest arising from the circumstances of Mr. Blandy's narrative—most of which the reader can imagine from what has been already disclosed—served to rivet his attention.

Startling and extraordinary as the story was, it had not the effect upon Lady Arden that Mr. Blandy had expected. Her spirits had seemingly been so broken by late events, that she appeared to be prepared to bear any calamity that might befall her; and although her contracted forehead, quivering lip, and occasional tremulous expression of astonishment, proved that she was struggling violently with her

feelings, she never gave way to the outbursts of anguish that Mr. Blandy had expected, when she learned that the earth had hardly settled upon the grave of her husband's first wife when she married him, utterly unconscious of any former tie; and that her own child would be dispossessed of his inheritance, in favour of the young man now before her. She listened to Mr. Blandy's details, as the agent handed him paper after paper, which his investigations had formed into a chain of evidence; and not until the very last did she give way to her emotion, and go off into a violent hysterical fit, which compelled Mr. Blandy to summon the servants.

Neither the young Arden nor Gudge were visible—indeed the latter had been so punished on the preceding evening, that he was still in bed, having his head bathed with vinegar by his consort. It was however essential that they should see him, and Mr. Blandy sent up to say that they would present themselves to him, in his bed-room, in a few minutes.

As the servant took up the card, and Mrs. Gudge read the name at the window, the attorney almost let the basin fall from his hands, as he was sponging his discoloured forehead.

"Blandy!" he exclaimed. "Blandy of Denbigh! What can he want with me—*now*? I won't see him: say I am ill, and can't be disturbed. He must be a brute to wish to worry me in this state!"

"The gentlemen are all staying down below, sir," said the man.

"Gentlemen! all! Why how many are there of them?" asked Gudge.

"Three, sir. One's a young gentleman."

"What?" asked Gudge, in a low hissing tone, between an exclamation and a question, as he almost sprang up in the bed, leaning on his elbow and looking earnestly at the servant, "Young? what's he like?"

"Very respectable looking young gentleman, sir," said the man.

"Here! hi!" continued Gudge, shouting to his wife. "Go down to them, and say they can come up in five minutes. Or, stop—no—you stay here: and West—you tell them."

The man left the room, and Gudge, turning to a table at the bed-side, on which was a liquor-stand, with some sugar, and a *curefe* of water, poured out a wine-glassful of what appeared to be pale brandy, and swallowed it off neat. He had of late taken to drink frightfully; and was never without spirits in his room.

"Don't take too much, G.," said his wife; "it can't do you any good."

"Hold your tongue!" he roared. "I have told you once before not to check me. I won't have it. You drive me to drink more, out of obstinacy,—there!"

And from mere opposition he took another glass; when his face, which had been quite pale, flushed into red patches, and his eyes were blazing.

Mrs. Gudge silently put the bed-room a little in order, and then sent for the visitors—having also concealed the liquor and glasses in a

clothes-press. They were heard ascending the stairs; and then they entered the room.

"How dy'e do, Blandy," cried Gudge, putting on a careless manner, as his former acquaintance approached the bed. "You see me laid up—a row last night with a young blood—but nothing of—"

He stopped short as his eye fell upon Christopher, who came in the last of the party. And then he as suddenly went on, roaring out—

"Take him away—off with him! We don't want *him* here!"

"Pardon me, Mr. Gudge," said Mr. Blandy, advancing; "but it is essentially necessary that he should remain. I regret we have chosen such an inopportune time for this meeting; but our business is of importance."

"What can *he* have to do with it?" asked Gudge.

Mr. Blandy looked round to the man who was pulling the window-curtain about, under pretence of doing something, to stay in the room. West took the hint and left, followed by Mrs. Gudge, and as the door closed after them, Mr. Blandy replied to Gudge's question, fixing his eye steadily on him:

"Nothing more than what the real heir to this property can be expected to have."

"Ho! that's it—is it?" roared the attorney, upon whom the brandy was beginning to take effect. "You think I am to be had so—do you? Why it's all a conspiracy! I know the tack you're going on; but it's a conspiracy, I tell you! You can't do me! What proofs have you got?"

"Mr. Aplin," said Mr. Blandy, calmly, turning to the agent, "oblige me with the case."

The other handed him a leather travelling desk, from which Mr. Blandy took some papers.

"It is a curious affair, Mr. Gudge," he went on, "and has not been disentangled without some trouble. But circumstances have followed with regular good fortune—for my client at least—one on the other; and I think I can make the affair pretty clear to you."

"You've got the wrong bull by the horns," cried Gudge, with a coarse oath.

"We shall see," said Mr. Blandy, mildly. "I find," he went on as he looked over the papers, "that in the year 1824 a gentleman known to the neighbourhood as Mr. Edwards (and to you as Sir Frederick Arden) lived, with his wife, in a cottage at Nantellyn."

"She was not his wife," interrupted Gudge.

"You must excuse me," said Mr. Blandy, "here is the copy of the marriage certificate,—'Frederick Arden' and 'Margaret Ellis.'"

And he laid the document on the bed. Gudge brushed it rudely aside with his hand.

"As the time arrived when the lady was to become a mother, a gentleman who managed the affairs of Sir Frederick Arden, such as they were—you must perceive that I do not yet give his name—heard of a match likely to benefit all parties. By marvellous ingenuity,

he contrived to bring it about, and even persuaded Sir Frederick Arden to carry his wife to Paris, to put the child with the *Enfant Trouvés* in the event of its being born there, and then to persuade the mother that the marriage had been a false one, and that they must part for ever—he engaging to make a handsome settlement, provided she always lived on the continent.”

“And what have I to do with all this? Go away—go away!” cried Gudge.

“Here is a letter Mr. Gudge written in your own hand, and signed with your own name,” continued Mr. Blandy, “laying out this scheme. My clerk, Mr. Fitch, found it and several others in the old secretary I took, with the fittings, when I bought your practice.”

As Gudge saw the letter, which Mr. Blandy next pulled from the case, he made a clutch at it, but the other held it back.

“A minute longer,” Mr. Blandy continued. “The poor mother never lived to reach Paris. She was confined at Chester, and she died the same night. The baby was confided to the care of a medical man who found a wet-nurse for it; but the remittances soon ceased and the parish took charge of it.”

“Come—finish—finish!” said Gudge, motioning impatiently with his hand. “I am ill—you see I am ill—and you worry me. How much more is there of this cock-and-bull story?”

“But very little,” continued Mr. Blandy. “The child, growing up, was put with one of the miners. From this occupation he fell in with some wandering mountebanks: he was next in your service; and after travelling abroad and at home, he has come back to establish his claim to the baronetcy: and cut, in an instant, the knot into which the affairs of the property have become entangled.”

“Keep away!” screamed the lawyer, as Christopher advanced towards him; “keep away! This is all a deep scheme, and you are a band of organized swindlers. But I’ll trounce you yet, as you shall find to your costs—”

“But the proofs, Sir?” interrupted Mr. Blandy.

“Damn your proofs, Sir,” Gudge went on. “The Arden Court estate is in my hands. I have got the title of every straw and duck-pond, and shall keep it until every farthing of the law-expenses are paid. I defy you all—and—you—and you, Sir!” he continued, shouting until his eyes almost started from his head. “I will have you taken up as common rogues and vagabonds. Now see—see what I will do!”

He rose up in bed, and tried to reach the bell-pull. But Mr. Blandy drew it away with one hand, as he put him back with the other.

“There is no occasion for the servants to be witnesses of this interview, Mr. Gudge,” he said. “Pray recollect yourself.”

“Touch me again, at your peril, sharper!” continued the other, his excitement increasing to a pitch that was literally fearful—additionally terrible as his face looked from the effects of his punishment on the preceding evening. “Give me the bell-pull! What? you won’t? Ho! West! West! We—s—t!”



THE DEATH OF THE KING

Screaming with rage, he was calling to the servant to attend, when suddenly his cry ended in a bubbling noise, and, with a fearful stare at Mr. Blandy, he fell backwards, as a torrent of blood gushed from his mouth over the pillow.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Blandy; "he has burst a blood-vessel. Call in some of the people. Stop! raise him up; and bring some cold water. Quick!"

With Christopher's assistance they lifted up his head, whilst Mr. Aplin now rang the bell violently. But this was of little use. The wretched attorney gave a gasp or two—as a fish might have done—and then his head fell forwards upon his chest. They did not at first know it; but he was dead!

By this time the servants had answered the bell, and in another minute Mrs. Gudge rushed into the room, and upon catching the first glimpse of the ghastly sight, fainted away, and was somewhat roughly deposited upon a sofa-bedstead by one of the people. Young Arden was the next who came to the scene, attracted by the noise.

"What's the row?" he asked, as he came close to the bed. And as he saw the body, he added, with a sudden exclamation, "what's this?"

His first thought was that the spectacle had resulted from the beating he had given the miserable wretch on the preceding evening.

"He has ruptured some vessel—I should expect in the brain," said Mr. Blandy, "in a passion. Has any one gone for a surgeon?"

"What—is he dead? Quite dead—are you certain?" said young Arden, reassured. And he went up to the body; and giving it a jog on the shoulder, called out, with brutal unconcern:—

"Halloo! hi! Gudge! It's all over, and no mistake. Well—that's one thing out of the way." And as he turned to Mr. Blandy he continued: "I beg your pardon, gentlemen; but are you friends of his? What is your business here?"

"We will speak of it presently," replied Mr. Blandy. "This horrible occurrence—so sudden—has somewhat overcome—"

"Ah—I dare say," replied young Arden. "Well—it hasn't affected me much." And he said this almost with a laugh. "But look here—if he's dead, I'm not going to have a corpse about in my house. West! do you hear? Wait till the doctor comes, and then get the body taken away. Must there be an inquest?"

"Of course," said Mr. Blandy.

"Very well; then I shan't have any such bother here. Get out one of the carts, and carry it down to the Arden Arms. And one of you women—look after his wife there. She'll make another if you don't mind. Perhaps you will be good enough to step this way, Sir."

He addressed himself to Mr. Blandy without taking the slightest notice of Christopher; and then quitted the room, leaving the others still almost stupified, not less from his heartlessness, than from the ghastly visitation itself.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

MR. BARNES WRITES TO HIS GUARDIAN.

IN the neighbourhood of the London University—bounded superiorly by the New Road, inferiorly by the buildings of the school, and forming what a surgeon would call the anastomosing branch between Gower Street and Euston Square, which would carry on the circulation, if the New Road was “taken up,” is a small artery in the great scale of London-Street anatomy, called Gower Place. If you were in Tottenham Court Road, and wished to discover it (to follow up the technical description) you would take the edge of Grafton Street for your guide, and following its course, next seek the baker’s at the corner, which will give you its situation. Gower Place is a modest and unassuming thoroughfare. Its houses consist, for the most part, of a first and second floor, and occasionally its areas are converted into use by book-binders, manglers, and persons of the like class; the approach to such regions being by curiously steep wooden steps, which render it necessary for you to ensure the safety of your neck before you venture down them.

The upper stories are tenanted by medical students, who pay in an inverse ratio, according to their seniority at the Hospital—a new man of course being charged more than a man of two sessions. Come down Gower Place what time of the day you will, and you are certain to meet a medical student; and if you had chosen that thoroughfare for your walk, at the time of our story, you would have been sure to have met Mr. Barnes; for he lodged there. In fact, it was, in a measure, his domestic world.

The room in which Mr. Barnes lived was not very tidy. The genius of departed tobacco perpetually hovered about the window curtains and carpets; and the housemaid found birds-eye tobacco, and demi-carbonized cigars in all sorts of wonderful places,—the former usually in a jug made like an old man’s head, with an expression of features that stamped him evidently of common extraction and debauched habits; and the latter stuck about wherever it was practicable, into images, on the ledges of the wainscoats, and behind pictures and looking-glasses. And here they remained for a long time undisturbed, as the one servant who waited upon everybody had never any time to put them away. And yet ‘Liza’ as they called her, was a very wonderful person, resembling those occupied on a treadmill more than any other class of society, inasmuch as she passed the greater part of her life in going up stairs, with the exception of that portion devoted to coming down again, or answering the door, which she usually did with an uncommonly dirty face, resulting from the combined action of black lead and industry. For all that, she was, however, as we have said, a very wonderful person—such a servant as one only meets in lodging-houses, being apparently able to make five beds at once, clean all the knives, and black all the boots and shoes simultaneously.

We have seen that Mr. Barnes was naturally of a festive disposition ; and as the winter went on, this turn for hilarity increased : for the nice bright fires and nice long nights appeared made exactly for parties. There were no cheerless grates filled up with snipped silver paper or tinted willow shavings : no cold rebuking daylight throwing out the sharp clear outlines of the streets, with the first ray of the industrious sun tipping the glazed hat of the solitary policeman, whose knowledge of fellowship was confined to night cats and cabmen : none of that to burst into the passage as Mr. Barnes said : " Well—good night old fellow," when he let the last guest out of the street-door. Convivial people might have gone to bed at seven in the morning and fancied that it was but one, for aught they knew to the contrary ; and if the company was dull, the fire sparkled and lighted up little beacons of cheerfulness upon all the bottles and glasses on the table, which did just as well.

Mr. Barnes was certainly not addicted to the conventional invitations of polite society. He never 'requested the pleasure' of his friends' company a fortnight before he wanted them : but that same day, he would send little notes round at lecture, written on margins torn from the pages of the 'Dublin Dissector,' containing three or four mysterious words, which however were always understood, and a nod of the head was the reply. He never put that 'the favour of an early reply was requested,' for in the first place, nobody would ever have sent one, and in the second, everybody always came. And then he did not receive them in the full dress of polite society ; but, with a perfect absence of anything like pride or affectation, in a shooting-jacket and slippers ; usually sitting before the fire, and making two chimney-ornaments of his feet, whilst he blew clouds towards the ceiling, like a vapoury triton. In fact, his appearance after he had shouted "come in!" when his friend entered, was more like that of a letter W than a human being, as viewed from behind. Then he invited his friend to have a pipe ; then more friends came in, and more pipes were in requisition, until by the time the servant had laid the supper, and received orders to bring a kettle of hot water, and go to bed, it was more by chance than eyesight that anybody found out exactly where their friends were sitting, through the cloud.

Mr. Barnes always provided plenty of refreshment—not made dishes, as may be imagined, but steady things to eat, such as baked potatoes, smoking from the can, and filling things at the price. Nor was beef absent—the brisket, cold, at ten-pence the pound, from somewhere over the way, or round the corner, or any other all-supplying locality, whence also came the streaky ham at two shillings.

These meetings went on regularly, and the people never complained, until, in an evil hour, Mr. Barnes bought a key bugle at a second-hand stall ; and during the time he was learning it, made such awful noises in the dead of night, that at last he received positive orders to quit. So the night before his departure he asked everybody he could get together, to come and make a great concert, bringing every musical

instrument they could command, whether they could play it or not, rather inclining, if there was a preference, to the ophyclidean, double bass and drum. They came, each with his accompaniment; and then, having taken the precaution previously to remove all his things to the lodgings of a friend—bit by bit, Mr. Barnes directed the concert.

There have been many rows amongst medical students since the days of Galen. There have been fearful noises in the lecture-rooms, and terrific combats at the door of the operating theatre of a rival hospital. They have sung and hallooed loudly in the streets by night, and they have fought with gloves and single-sticks in the dissecting-room by day, but never arose such an unearthly tumult as upon the present momentous occasion. In vain the landlord came up to implore less tumult: he was directly saluted with crusts, potatoe rinds, and beer: in vain did his partner follow in his wake: the presence of the fair sex but excited them to fresh outbursts of sound. Long were the inhabitants of Gower Place scared from their sleeping propriety by wild harmony and savage dances in the road and on the pavement; and several times were the quiet people next door knocked up by mistake, when the guests returned again and again to thank Mr. Barnes for such a jolly evening, and say how happy they should always be to see him and his friends. And then Mr. Barnes invited the whole party also to dine with him that day week, and bring everybody they knew along with him. But this is supposed to have been a very random piece of politeness, uttered at a time when Mr. Barnes's ideas were not in the clearest state; for when Liza entered the room the next morning, she was scared to death at finding Mr. Barnes asleep very comfortably, in his clothes, upon the table, amongst all sorts of oyster shells, pewter pots, and bits of bread, and other remnants of what constituted the supper.

This was the last party given by Mr. Barnes, for he left the next day. It was rather an awkward affair for him, as his money was running very short, and he had owed the landlord so much, that it took all he had in hand to pay him. But not knowing exactly where to go, with the certainty of establishing an immediate credit, he quartered himself upon his different friends as a nightly visitor. For instance, on Monday Mr. Bowles put a sofa in the sitting-room at his service: and on Tuesday, finding Mr. Cuff was going out of town he had his bed. On Wednesday he would wait at the hospital until some census-increasing case required attendance, when he would go, and lie down in the interval on the chairs provided for "the docthor" as he was termed by the Hibernians amongst whom the practice chiefly lay. On Thursday Mr. Rubby would make him an ingenious extempore couch of great coats and carpet bags on the hearth rug, before the dying fire: and on Friday, finding out some men who were going up to the College, he would, in the event of their passing, join in the event, and never go to bed at all. And here he would make himself so vastly entertaining, that a student who lived out of town,

would get enchanted with him, and ask him to come down to his little place for Saturday and Sunday, by which means he would get pretty well through the week.

Still this was a predatory Arab kind of existence that would not do for a constancy: and therefore Mr. Barnes determined to appeal to his guardian. It would not do to ask him point-blank for the money; but he went over the question in all its bearings with Mr. Cuff, and after a great many copies, they produced the following epistle between them:

"My dear Guardian,

"Having a spare half hour from the almost unceasing—what shall we say after 'unceasing?'—enquired Mr. Barnes.

"*Curriculum*'s the word," answered Cuff. "They put it in the cards of lectures. '*Curriculum of study.*' That'll knock him over at once, if he's feeble-minded."

"But what is curriculum?" continued Barnes. "Look it out."

Mr. Cuff's Ainsworth's Dictionary had no covers, and began at SPB in the English-Latin part, and ended at ORN in the Latin-English. Its first solution of continuity had occurred from its being too frequently used to blow the fire. Fortunately the word required was in the portion extant.

"'*Curriculum,*'" Mr. Cuff went on, "'a place to run in.'"

Mr. Barnes thought something about Lord's Cricket Ground.

"'*A cart,*'" continued Mr. Cuff: "'a customary exercise.'"

"That will do," said Mr. Barnes. "Heaven forgive me, *curriculum*'s the word."

And he went on writing.

"—Of my curriculum of study, I cannot, I think, employ it better than in letting you know how I am getting on, as it is a long time since I wrote last. I am in comfortable lodgings—"

"I'd say 'at present,'" suggested Mr. Cuff, who had some vague fear of Mr. Barnes coming to live entirely.

"Oh! of course, that's understood. On we goes again.—'With only one drawback. Some dissipated young men live in the house, whose noise at times confuses me. They never seem to take any tea, nor have they the slightest idea of professional conversation, but I have firmly, but mildly, refused their approaches to intimacy.'"

"He won't think its me, though, you mean—will he?" asked Mr. Cuff.

"All right," replied his friend. "How will he know where it is? I'm not going to put the address."

"Then how will you get the money?"

"I shall have it sent to the Hospital, under cover, to the secretary. Don't you see how respectable it looks. Ah, that puts me in mind—how am I to ask for it?"

"Say you want it to pay for dissections."

"No go, Fred.," said Mr. Barnes, shaking his head. "If I had dissected all the bills of mortality, I couldn't have got through the

CHAPTER LIX.

AFFAIRS ARE STILL LOOKING UP.

MEANWHILE Tom and his pretty little partner had returned to London : and when Christopher came back again from Arden Court, they were the first persons he called upon.

The interview with the family at the great house, after the death of Gudge, had been, as may be conceived, one of a stormy and, at first, unsatisfactory character. Young Arden's ill-governed and head-strong temper, more than once provoked Christopher to an open struggle : whilst everybody, indeed, was so confused and shocked by the events of the last night and morning, that little more than a preliminary understanding was arrived at. It was, therefore, thought best, by Mr. Blandy and his companions, to take up their abode for a day or two at the Arden Arms, as being the more independant mode of proceeding, whilst these gentleman brought affairs into a proper train, for the denouement.

In this time the body of the wretched attorney was removed at night from the Court, and taken to the inn, where, in a room over the coach-house, used for an apple-loft, it was left to await the inquest—the landlord refusing to receive him in the house from the dread of being saddled with some imaginary duties and misfortunes arising therefrom, common amongst country innkeepers. Mrs. Gudge, with that perfect want of any controul over the feelings, so common with uneducated women, had never left the bed to which she had been carried in her fainting fit ; but had passed the time in tearless howling, and appeals of that conventional sort, which any one experienced in the behaviour of the lower classes, in time of sudden trouble, can so readily call to mind.

To do Lady Arden full justice, her behaviour throughout the trying three or four days that followed the crash was most exemplary. The mastery which Gudge had obtained by his unscrupulous chicanery, over herself and her property, had so broken down her spirits, that any change in the position of affairs was almost to be desired ; and after her first surprise, which indeed amounted almost to stupefaction, as she learned the heartless acts of her husband preceding her marriage, a load appeared to have been removed from her mind at finding herself once more mistress of her own income—as far as it went. The rash match made by her son had, it is true, little in it that betokened a future of even ordinary happiness. The two young people had deceived each other, and fallen into a mutual trap, from which they could look forward to no favourable issue.

Christopher returned to London before the others. His appearance at Arden Court was only the signal for a shower of insults from the quondam Sir Frederick ; and therefore Mr. Blandy, ever anxious to preserve peace, undertook to remain, and brings things into their

right course, in as kind a manner as might be,—sparing the feelings of all by his delicate and cautious proceedings,—therefore Mr. Blandy, with his agent, remained still at the inn, the latter journeying backwards and forwards, to and from town, as occasion required.

It is needless to tell how happy Tom and Bessy were to see him—how almost beside themselves they appeared to be when they heard of his strange fortune: how, at the same time, their delight was not altogether free from feelings of awe, and a doubt whether they were at liberty to call him Christopher any longer. But their friend soon dispelled that, and took up his lodging at the library—now quite a fashionable milliner's as well—just as he had done before, finding great relief from his high-pressure thoughts at the present time, by telling them his adventures on his lecturing travels when Tom closed the shutters and they were all comfortably at supper.

One evening Skittler paid them a visit just as they were about to commence their meal: and having produced some enormous baked potatoes, of the size of half quartern loaves, from his pocket, which he stacked up upon the hob till they were wanted, he observed:—

"There's nothing like a warm potater as a real comfort in a storm. If ladies knew how superior they was to muffs, they'd never be without one. Fire and food, all in one."

"You are very good, Skittler," said Sprouts.

"Not at all, Tom; anythink to serve you, you know. And Mr. Christopher, too. I've heard all about it. Why, you'd be able to grow your own potatoes now. I'll give you some of the finest Irish fruit you ever saw. But that's not what I've come about: though I am glad that young Baronet's in the wrong box."

Christopher made no reply; but Sprouts went on,—

"And now he's there, I hope they'll lock it, and not let him out again."

"Wery good," Skittler went on. "I have seen a good deal of him at Nick Mawley's, and depend upon it he's no good. And he won't improve—no, not if he were turned out into a straw-yard for six months, and blistered. He's naturally vicious. It wouldn't do him the least good."

"Well—we'll change the subject, Skittler," said Bessy, who saw that Christopher did not care to enter into the conversation whilst it took that turn.

"That's what I'm coming to," replied he. "I've met a nice gentleman at Nick Mawley's, who's a sort of a doctor: and he let out the other night that he didn't go on well with his landlord, and wanted a lodging. He'd been letting off fireworks in his bed-room, or got up a rat-hunt there, or something; but nothink to talk about!"

"Lor! Skittler," exclaimed Bessy; "he must be very uncomfortable in a house."

"Not a bit," replied Skittler; "it was all his fun: he's just as quiet as a mouse when he chooses. But he can sing an uncommon good song, to be sure."

"And what about him?" asked Sprouts.

"Why, just this. If you've got a spare room he'd take it at ten shillings a week. It's rather a good step from his hospital you see, but he don't mind that, because he says he never goes there now, as there's no pretty girls amongst the in-patients. But I'll warrant him respectable, of the name of Barnes."

"Oh!" observed Christopher, "I know him—a very good-tempered, pleasant fellow."

Bessy looked enquiringly at Tom to know what he thought about it; for she had a great notion of his opinion in everything. And then they consulted Christopher; and at last agreed to receive Mr. Barnes as an inmate.

"There's only one thing against it," said Skittler: "you hav'nt got a latch-key door, and if he comes you must have one, because he's of very early habits."

"So are we, Skittler," said Bessy.

"Yes, I know; but the case is different. I mean he'd generally be coming home when you were getting up, and if he hit the time, all right; but if he was a little earlier, it wouldn't be comfortable."

"I'll treat you to a latch-key," said Christopher smiling; "and then Mr. Barnes will be perfectly comfortable. So that's all settled."

In a day or two Mr. Barnes arrived: and the first night he joined the party, not proud, but perfectly at his ease, as if he had known them all his life. His luggage was not very extensive, in fact, at first, it appeared only to consist of a short pipe, a tooth-brush, and a blue shirt, wrapped up in a play-bill. But by degrees he collected various articles of wearing apparel from the different friends upon whose hearths he had literally thrown himself, which had been left behind. And such appeared to be the commonwealth of socks and collars enjoyed by these gentlemen, that none were marked alike, albeit they all fitted everybody: and as they never troubled themselves about "lists to be retained," their washerwomen amongst them, kept up a sort of circulating wardrobe for the students, which enabled them to adopt a variety of fashions in shirts at a comparatively small cost.

Tom was therefore doing very well: for he contrived to let off the greater part of his house and live almost rent-free. And as soon as Mr. Chirpey found that there was a cheery acquaintance amongst the inmates, who believed in beer above all liquids, he would invite Mr. Barnes to have a pipe. And then Mr. Barnes returned the hospitality, so that at last, quite a series of little visitings was established amongst them all, which made the long winter evenings things to admire greatly. And Hickory and Patsy were never absent from the parties, although Christopher was frequently obliged to be away, at distances varying from Arden Court to the north of England, upon his own affairs.

It was not long before Tom was enabled, by increase of business, to set up a boy—a regular street boy, who wore a cap and an apron, and had resolution of mind far beyond his years, inasmuch as he would slang men who might have put him in their pockets, if ever he saw an

opportunity. He was very sharp, though, and active: and in addition to the small sums paid weekly to him for his services, he made a little fortune by the heavy ransoms he put upon the tops and shuttlecocks that tumbled down the area, which up to this time Bessy had always delivered back to the lamenting owners free of tax. He had many admirable qualities. He would sing negro lyrics standing on his head; was a great popular melodist generally: knew how to go over upon his hands and feet like a wheel: and could whistle with his fingers, when he went to the gallery of the transpontine theatres, in such an awful manner, that no leader dared to delay the commencement of an overture after the shrill note had once excited the indignation of an expectant people.

In the improvement and cultivation of this young gentleman's physical and intellectual acquisitions, Mr. Barnes discovered a new source of pleasure; so that, altogether, looking all over London, there was not to be found anywhere, so perfect a happy family as that which, from its flourishing state, now formed the principal feature of the court. And when gas supplied the place of the two candles that burned into cocked-hat wicks in the window: and the back parlour was turned into a regular milliner's show-room, with a looking-glass that took up half of one wall, the establishment altogether promised in time to become an important fact in the annals of metropolitan improvements.

CHAPTER LX.

CHRISTOPHER AT ARDEN COURT.

THERE was a great deal of worry and bother—of trying to make out old crackling parchments and wondering if the lawyers themselves understood all they were committing to fresh sheets—of doubting, and combating, and beating—before Christopher felt quite at his ease, and considered himself a man of property.

But Mr. Blandy at last got everything into such a smooth train, and so well, that, although his young client was not able just yet to avail himself of any of the actual pecuniary returns of the estate, yet he found no difficulty in obtaining whatever money he wanted. And all the people who had any interest in the land about, whether as tenants or simple labourers were so glad to see a better state of management likely to spring up, than the late wild position of affairs, that they all were anxious to make every thing as agreeable as possible to the gentleman who had so strangely come to be their new master.

As soon as practicable, Christopher went down and took formal possession. He was still, however, obliged to be constantly running backwards and forwards: so that he had not yet become

acquainted with any of the resident families. Neither was this his wish at present. He was too much attached to his old friends to desire any other circle of acquaintances, beyond that which might be kept up by courtesies or neighbourly etiquette of the simplest description. And giving out, that he did not intend to visit until all his affairs had been finally and entirely arranged, he was left to do as he pleased with regard to those he more especially chose to have about him.

Who these were, may be readily guessed. And as from the very first moment when he had obtained a glimpse of a chance of being master of Arden Court, his first great idea had been that of receiving and entertaining those whom he had best known in his struggling days, he determined upon, at last, gathering them together in his own large house. Therefore, he sent up invitations to all he most wished to see from London, (getting Tom and Mr. Barnes to find out the addresses of the parties,) and also to his tenants and the resident neighbours of that class which he thought would not render the others uncomfortable or constrained by their presence.

You may be sure that no one refused the invitation. Tom was indefatigable in running about and beating them up: and finding out the hours of the trains and the expense; and what time they were to meet at his house. So that, at last, the little room was quite filled, when the evening came; and if the clerks at the London terminus of the railway were astonished at the merry company who entered all of a heap, how much more was the gentleman who stamped the tickets, and the policeman who took them, when they all arrived at the station in the country.

It was a downright jolly winter's evening—snowy, moonlight, and nipping cold. The snow was not falling, that is to say, but it lay deep upon the ground; and hung on the branches of the trees, now and then tumbling down with the slightest noise through the bare sprays. But otherwise, all was still—not a sound broke the wintry quiet; for wheels were muffled, and sheep-bells folded: watch-dogs curled themselves up in the depths of their kennels, and weirs were bound in ice. But everywhere warm lights gleamed from habitations—the railway-station coming out particularly brilliant; and when the glowing engine came up with the train, with the lamps in the carriages shining through the windows, nothing could be so comfortable as everything looked.

It took a little time to put down the passengers, for they had all boxed themselves up so snugly, that what with knocking at the glass to be let out, and the hard work they had to pull down the windows, and open the doors when they had done so; and then their utter forgetfulness of whereabouts their personal effects had been stowed away—what with all this, the engine had thawed all the snow into a pool where it stopped, into which the cinders kept hissing and tumbling. But at length they were all deposited.

What a merry party they were! There was Skittler with his own

old "merry bit of wood," as he still called his fiddle; and Hickory with a bundle which contained a cocked hat and a next-to-new soldier's coat; because Christopher had insisted that he should appear, for that occasion only, as he used to do. And then out came the jolly man and Mrs. Chirpey, with Susan the servant carrying a fresh baby, and more baskets than one family could have been supposed capable of possessing. In the same carriage, too, were Tom and his little wife, and Patsy; and from an adjacent one descended good old Dr. Aston and Mr. Blandy, together with Mr. Mole, under whose gallant charge were placed three or four pretty trim-built girls, in close-fitting tight-armed high dresses, who assisted Mrs. Sprouts—we had well nigh called her Bessy Payne—when she was over busy. And—my heart! what fun they had with Mr. Mole, and how they nearly worried him to death, set on, as they were, by the indestructible Mr. Barnes, who was the life and soul of the carriage all the way down. For he sung "Tippetywitchet," and imitated the behaviour that Mr. T. Mathews might be supposed to indulge in on a railway journey, especially when the engine screamed; and at every station he called the policeman to him, and asked him a conundrum, telling him he should have the answer on his return; but recommending him in the meantime, to keep the riddle in a dry place—with many other fancies.

At length they had collected all their luggage; and at the station-door they found a ruddy-faced man with hay-bands round his ankles, and a coat very fashionably made out of a sack, who asked them "if they was the party expected at Arden Court;" and upon being told that they were, he led them to the conveyance. It was not an omnibus, nor a van, but a real old-fashioned broad-wheeled waggon, drawn by a team of horses, with bells jangling on their head pieces, and covered by a large tarpaulin, with three or four trusses of straw shaken down inside, and a lantern hanging from the top. This was fun! and when they got in, all of a heap, and Mr. Barnes put his head out, as funny men in plays look out of bed-curtains, and said "good night!" to the station clerk, begging at the same time to be remembered to his aunt when he saw her, and telling him to "write soon," they laughed so loud that the driver was almost scared. And this went on, all across the common, more especially when the waggon got suddenly into deep ruts, which jolted them all against one another; for it had no springs; but that made it all the merrier.

It took a long while—two hours and more—to get to Arden Court; yet it did not appear a quarter of the time. But at last they turned up the lane leading to the lodge-gates, and then there were plenty of wheel-tracks and horse-shoe marks; and now and then they met an empty cart returning. Such excitement had never been known. All the old chesnut trees had lanthorns hung to them, as well as the gate-posts; and as they went up the avenue, every window in the house poured forth a flood of light, just as if it had been a magnified

portion of those illuminated villages, which the men carry upon their heads about the streets at night.

All the people from the village were up at the terrace, in spite of the cold, looking in at the windows to see what was going on, watching the arrivals, and speculating upon the supper which was to be provided in the laundry, for all comers. And when the waggon appeared, with its light seen through the tilt, and Skittler's fiddle playing a merry tune—looking for all the world like a race-course booth upon wheels—they gave such a cheer: and a firework, that a great maker in London had expressly set up over the porch, went off at the moment, and formed the word "welcome," in a star of squibs. Whereupon the people hurrah'd more than ever—never having before seen anything so wonderful—and the guests all came to the windows: all the dogs for miles about joined in the chorus, and the firework cases banged off one after another, Mr. Barnes exhibiting painful terror at every report; in the midst of all which the party descended, and were met by Christopher—for he was still Christopher to them, and we cannot call him by any other name—in the porch.

That *was* a moment! He came out smiling, as Hickory and Tom and Bessy got down first; and as he took the old man's hand, was about to give them all a merry greeting, when his voice suddenly fell, and he burst into tears. Not tears of sorrow though, for he laughed through them, as he wrung his friends' hands and said how foolish he was, but that his heart was so full, it had better run over at once. The poor old man was not less affected, and even at that minute, in all the excitement and noise, he could not help once more picturing the little curly-headed boy he had found at the cross-road—how he had gone about with him to the fairs and revels, and now, how he had come to be a great man. Poor Luddy, if he had been alive, what would he have thought of it? And then he brought Patsy forward, and Christopher caught her in his arms and kissed her—not a bit caring for everybody looking on; and after that he kissed Bessy too, at which Tom was not jealous at all. And this arrangement appeared such an excellent one to Mr. Barnes, that he forthwith told all the pretty little milliner girls to "come to his arms," and made such violent pantomime, expressive of affection of the most unbounded order, towards them, that they almost screamed; and there was great confusion and jostling in the corners of the porch, and exclamations of that galvanic kind, that are the effect of tickling upon timid constitutions.

The luggage was carried into the store-room, and before they came into the hall, they all saw their things in their proper destinations: for a regiment might apparently have been billeted on the house, without entirely occupying it. It did not take them very long to arrange their toilets, for Christopher had told them that he should expect them as he had always known them, and that if they made themselves fine, he should be very uncomfortable. And so they were

soon ready, and, led by the jolly man and his "good lady," came down into the hall.

The old place looked so well. All young Arden's alterations had been taken away, and it had been restored to its original state. The village tinman had received an order for sconces that almost frightened him; and these were hung wherever a nail could be put to suspend one from, so that the effect of so many lights was, as the girls observed, "lovely." And if ever a bonfire had been established inside a house, there was one on the large hearth, which roared and sparkled and bounced, and behaved generally in such an extraordinary manner, that only the strong-minded approached it. Its glow beat that from the candles clean away; and as its light danced and flickered on the old portraits, they appeared to wink and laugh again in its brightness.

The company was composed, chiefly of the neighbouring farmers, and their wives and hearty families—some of whom were tenants on the Arden estate. But besides these, the clergyman of the village had come up, as well as the doctor; and so, when Mr. Blandy and Dr. Aston arrived, these four made a very comfortable rubber, in a corner, out of the way of everybody. Bessy had been quite frightened at first—nervous about coming into a large room, and before so many people; but she soon found that her own party, being the Londoners, were looked up to, if anything, by the others. And, although for a few minutes after the arrival they all sat quietly against the wall, looking at one another, yet everybody was so excited about the occasion of their meeting together, and so determined upon doing all they could to make a famous evening of it, that they soon got as friendly as if they had formed the same circle all their lives.

And, certainly, much of this was due to Mr. Barnes, whose first act was to get down a halberd from over the fire-place, and, having routed out an old hunting-horn from a trophy of rusty instruments, surmounted by a stag's antlers at the foot of the staircase, he thereon blew a note of such singular power and discordance, that all the glasses and tumblers on the sideboard rang like a peal of bells. This done, he made a speech, to the effect that if they did not immediately begin to do something convivial, he should charge and disperse them all with the tremendous weapon he carried. On this the musicians were called in, and the dancing began.

The musicians formed the band that preceded the village club, when they had their dinner and procession once a year, at the Arden Arms. They were principally great in marches, and unequalled in "*Le Petit Tambour*," and the trumpet duet from *Puritani*; but had got up several popular country-dances for the occasion, of which be sure that *The Tank*, *The Triumph*, *The Recovery*, and the *Dusty Miller* were the especial favourites. As for Sir Roger de Coverly, that formed an excitement by itself, and was not to be classed with the others. Moreover, it was not to be undertaken until after supper, when the musicians had not only eaten and drunk their fill, but rested sufficiently to enter upon that great task.

Christopher was so occupied—running anxiously about to everybody to know if they were comfortable—receiving fresh visitors—darting into the supper-room—then into the kitchen, and then to look after the villagers' banquet in the laundry—that he deputed Mr. Barnes, to be the Master of the Ceremonies for the occasion, and get up the first dance. This was rather a feat to accomplish; but Mr. Barnes, being naturally powerful, introduced everybody, whether he knew them or not; marshalled them into their ranks with his halberd; specified the figure, and then took his own place.

And here we must shew you, by the aid of a diagram—as lecturers say—how the guests were disposed for

The Band.* (in a window recess.)	THE FIRST DANCE.	The Whist Party.* (in a corner.)
Relatives and Friends.*	Christopher.	Patsy.
	Sprouts (<i>a</i>).	Mrs. Sprouts.
	Mr. Chirpey (<i>b</i>).	Mrs. Hornbeam (<i>c</i>).
	Mr. Hornbeam (<i>d</i>).	Mrs. Chirpey.
	Mr. Barnes (<i>e</i>).	Miss Davis (<i>f</i>).
	Mr. Mole (<i>g</i>).	Miss Howard (<i>h</i>).
	Mr. John Daw (<i>i</i>).	Miss E. Wursell (<i>k</i>).
	Mr. Philip Daw.	Miss C. Wursell.
	Mr. Mangles (<i>m</i>).	Miss Wursell (<i>l</i>).
	Tom Baker (<i>o</i>).	Miss Allen (<i>p</i>).
	Mr. Wursell (<i>n</i>).	Miss Barnes.
	Skittler.	The pretty maid (<i>q</i>).
Relatives and Friends.*		

The Servants and Villagers allowed to look in at the door.

- a*) Sprouts not having been long married, very properly dances with his wife.
- b*) Mr. Chirpey, having passed the first illusions, selects another partner.
- c*) Mrs. Hornbeam is very pretty and buxom; but is a little frightened at first, not knowing whether to laugh or be alarmed at the jolly man's pleasantries.
- d*) Mr. Hornbeam is the young miller, down by the village, whose father is so rich, but rather offended with him for marrying his pretty wife without a fortune. This don't seem to affect their spirits much.
- e*) Mr. Barnes dances in all parts of the set at once to the great bewilderment of
- f*) Miss Davis, who is one of the little milliner friends of Bessy, and thinks Mr. Barnes the greatest fun she knows.
- g*) Mr. Mole has on a long white waistcoat, and wears a heavy watch-chain and pumps with singularly large ties. He is not very well up in his dancing, but this only affords great amusement to his preceptress,
- h*) Miss Howard—such a pretty girl, with a quantity of dark hair, and eyes, black and bead-like, like those of a dormouse—another of Bessy's pretty brigade.
- i*) Mr. John Daw, and his brother, Mr. Philip Daw, rent one of the farms on the Arden property, and, big in the yeomanry cavalry, have come in their soldiers' clothes, to the admiration of the room, and especially of
- k*) Miss E. Wursell and Miss C. Wursell, who are the literary daughters of a farmer at the Sheep-leas, and always use fine language, until the poor old man can hardly understand them. They take in the "Ladies Cabinet of Fashion," and once sent an 'Impromptu' to it, which took them a year to write.
- l*) Miss Wursell—their eldest sister, finding that she does not get an offer, teaches

There never was a first dance of any party so merry as this was. Everybody appeared as intimate with everybody else in five minutes as if they had known one another for years : and when it was over and they had all danced and jostled down the middle and up again, and in pousette had endured such extraordinary concussions that it required some firmness of flesh and blood to withstand them, then no more introductions were wanted. After one of the dances, Hickory was prevailed upon to treat the company with one of his old songs, to give due effect to which he went out of the hall and put on his peculiar costume. And when Christopher saw him come in again with the soldier's coat, and cocked hat and umbrella, he was almost entirely overcome : and was glad that they were all too much occupied with the performance to watch him. For he had not heard poor old Hickory sing since the night they were at the "Ring o' Bells," at Bidstone, before Rocky took him away.

How the song went ! They laughed at all the jokes, and at a great many things never meant to be jokes at all, so heartily, that when the singer had concluded, they were really too exhausted to dance again, at that immediate instant, and refreshments generally were ordered in. In a minute, the billiard-table, which had been rudely pushed up to the end of the hall, and covered with the trestle-boards from the club-room at the Arden Arms, almost creaked under the weight of the bowls of steaming punch and negus, and gushing decanters, and large brown jugs, with household regiments of tumblers, custard-cups with handles, and wine-glasses, that were placed upon it.

And then there was such a confusion of merry tongues : it is wonderful how the whist-players contrived to play through the noise. The very fire appeared to laugh and enter into the celebration : more especially when Mr. Barnes poked the logs with his halberd to make a great scintillation go up the chimney, and then cried "ooray-y-!"—as the boys in the streets would have done—and made extravagant gestures of reckless revelry before the fire-place. And the musicians,

at an infant-school and lends good books to the cottagers. She thinks she is doing wrong in dancing, and would not have stood up, for anything, only the clergyman is in the room, whom she regards as an amulet.

m) Mr. Mangles has a wharf on the canal for corn and coals, and is about to form a connection with

n) Mr. Wursell, who bought the brewery cheap when the London man failed, and supplied the Arden Arms with its 'entire.'

o) Tom Baker is the pride of the village—a young gentleman-farmer who keeps harriers, horses the Rookfield coach between Shurley and Marcombe, takes in *Bell's Life*, which he lends on Monday to the public-house, has terrible stories told of his pranks, and can't be caught to marry, anyhow ; nevertheless, at present he is intensely admiring.

p) Miss Allen and Miss Baines—two more of Bessy's friends.

q) The Pretty Maid, with whom Skittler is certainly struck, and who is allowed to appear without a cap, and with her hair dressed that she may not feel uncomfortable.

*) The stars indicate the various positions of Hickory, as he goes about the room paying great attention to all the Relatives and Friends, and bringing them anything in the way of refreshment that they may want.

too, so entered into the prevalent hilarity that they could not keep quiet, but played whether anybody was dancing, or no.

The mirth was at its very highest, when there was a loud ring at the bell, which startled everybody into silence, for the moment; and Christopher could not conceive who it could be arrived so late; for the supper-time was approaching." So he went to look out, at the bay window, accompanied by Mr. Barnes.

"Why—it's a bathing-machine," he said at first, as he saw a curious vehicle draw up at the door. "How on earth did a bathing-machine ever get here?"

"No—it's a show," exclaimed Mr. Barnes. "Something wonderful, going through the village, heard of the lark here to-night, and came up upon spec; depend upon it."

"No—no—it's not," said Skittler, who joined them, "it's a deer-cart, I can see it plainer now. Well—that's as curious as any thing else—to come up here at this time of night."

But whilst he was speaking, the cart was backed against the steps, and the servant who had answered the bell, opened the doors behind, and bringing out a chair, made a sort of step for whatever was inside to alight upon. The next instant a female form, of large proportions, came out upon the quivering cane-work, and, with the assistance of the man, at last was safely landed upon the ground.

"Well!" observed Skittler, as he flattened his face against the casement pane through which he was staring: "if it isn't I'm—"

Never mind what would have happened to him had it not been. As it was, he was spared the punishment that awaited any error he might have been guilty of.

"It's that very same old lady," he said, "as I brought home, years ago, in the Taggiony, from Richmond to the old Half-way House at Knightsbridge: and she's got on the very same gown!"

He was right. It was Mrs. Hamper; and she was in the identical dress—the half-washed-out pattern of the chocolate figures on the yellow ground, and trimmed with the same extraordinary arrangement of fringe and tassels, and large buttons that had whilome distinguished her.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Christopher: "what can she want here?"

The arrival of the lady in the porch furnished him with a speedy answer. She would not enter the hall, at first, but stood beckoning to Christopher, until he went to her, when she began, seizing him warmly by the hand:—

"How do you *do*? how do you *do*? you naughty, naughty boy! And never to let me know of what had happened, in all my sorrow and tribulation, which of course you have heard about. Oh dear! oh dear! my poor head! I am in such a state of mind, I don't know what will become of me."

"Barnes!" said Christopher, aside, to his friend, "set the dances going again. I'll be with you directly." And having thus diverted the attention of the guests, who were all eyes for the new arrival, Christo-

pher led Mrs. Hamper into the store-room going from the hall, taking a glass of negus for her on his way, which had the effect of making her feel much better.

"I thought I never should have got here!" she said, as she put down the glass "I heard of what was going on, in London, and came down by the train which brought all your party. But there—do you know—they had put a horrid dog into the same locker with my bandbox: and I had a cold tongue in my bandbox—the nicest best-flavoured one you ever saw, with only two slices cut out of it, which my dear Lady Palawar's butler allowed me to take away from her *Sandwich Musicale* on Thursday evening. Well, this horrible brute tore the box open to get at the tongue—which I had brought because I always like to have something with me in case I should feel weak and there is nothing handy in the house—and ate it all, and so upset my things that I kept the train nearly a quarter of an hour whilst the good men in the police coats were diving after them."

"That was a pity," said Christopher: "for I sent a waggon."

"I know you did," replied Mrs. Hamper: "but I could not reach it in time. And what was I to do? Why, what I did—there was nothing else left. The only conveyance was a deer-cart, left by the hunt, at the Railway Tavern that is close to the station; and they told me there was a very steady man who would drive me over. Dear me!—that reminds me; he is not paid. You haven't six shillings about you I suppose; have you? It will save me from changing a check."

Christopher immediately produced the money,

"Thank you," said Mrs. Hamper: "and now—don't let me interrupt your merriment. Ah! dear! I am not exactly fitted to enter into it: you have heard of my unhappy girl, and that low, vile young scamp she eloped with. Well—well; she's punished, and it may be a lesson to her for the future. I will go into your ball-room: you see I came all prepared. But if I had not been I should have made myself at home, you know."

Christopher was aware of the probability.

"For we are relations, now," she continued. "Dear me! to think—well—ah! we will talk of that bye and bye. But let us now join your company."

Upon which Mrs. Hamper took off her bonnet, under which her hair was dressed in her own peculiar fashion, and went with Christopher into the hall.

The greater part of the company were dancing, so that her entrance did not cause any very great confusion; and she directly took her place near the card-table, with the intention of cutting in, whenever one of the present players relinquished the game, which soon happened, on the occasion of a message brought in to the village doctor. And then they all went on jollily until supper, which was laid out in the dining-room.

It was not exactly the sort of supper you would have looked for at a London party—principally from the absence of everything unfit to eat. There were no indigestible lighthouses, nor plaster-of-Paris trophies—

no barley sugar bird-cages nor *papier maché* pie crusts ; but such cold joints of meat—such rounds, and sirloins, and mighty hams, that the table gave you only the notion of Smithfield roasted entire. There were large apple pies—not ‘tarts,’ but honest old-fashioned *pies*—that a giant need not have turned up his nose at ; and such huge dishes of frothing trifle, that the mill-stream, had it now been going instead of locked up by the ice, could only have rivalled the foam upon them. The cold plum-pudding too, was a wonder—not as to how it was made, but where it was boiled, and who was found to carry it to the table ; and when Tom Baker said that at all events there was enough of it to settle everybody’s love, so that perhaps there might be a chance for himself, they laughed so loud that the sprig of red-berried holly, stuck in the top, quite nodded again.

What they ate and drank, and what they talked about, would have puzzled Rabelais to have enumerated. For they did eat beef, veal, ham, brawn, chicken, partridge, pheasant, tongue, pigeon pie, raised pie, apple pie, quince pie, puffs, turnovers, maccaroons, biscuits, ratafias, figs, oranges, brandy cherries, chips, blanchmange, trifles, jellies, custards, creams, grapes, bread, and even the unknown substance, so to speak, whereof the inside of cracker bonbons is created.

And they did drink strong ale, stout, table beer, cyder, perry, port, sherry, champagne, elder wine, red negus, lemonade, punch, brandy, gin, rum, hollands, shrub, whisky, tea, coffee, cape, orange, and ginger ; and did so tipple, sip, drain, blush, refuse, accept, bow, smile, take a pull, a hearty draught, just a drop, a little, some, from tumbler, wine-glass, custard-cup, tankard, pewter, horn, mug, jug, flask and rummer, until the fun, jokes, quips, quirks, wrinkles, vows, whims, promises, whispers, and discourse generally, became so very lively that nobody heard or understood anything but what he himself uttered, and sometimes not even that.

The supper went on, amidst the most delightful noise ; but when they went back to the hall the great effect came. For after Mr. Barnes, who was in the secret, had marshalled all the company into order, with his halberd—which he did in a diverting manner, making pretence to smash obtruding toes and getting them all in a line by attacking projecting profiles, as that celebrated general, Mr. W. H. Payne, is wont to do when reviewing his big-headed forces—after all this was arranged, Christopher opened the large doors of the hall. And then, to the great delight of the company there came in—what you will hardly expect—the original Taglioni waggon drawn by the original donkey and bearing a young yew tree, from the branches of which depended so many little trinkets, and twinkling illumination lamps, that if there had been a conservatory attached to Aladdin’s garden, it never could have produced anything so beautiful. There was a roar of admiration, at this pretty spectacle, which Christopher’s foreign experience of Christmas had given rise to ; and when he told them the history of the cart, in a few words that somewhat tried his eyes again to deliver, and added that they were all to select some presents for their partners, the delight was more than doubled. As for Skittler, he was fairly beside himself ; and could

not help going to Mrs. Hamper, and saying,—in the most respectful way in the world though :—

“I think, mum, you must recollect that little vehicle.”

Upon which Mrs. Hamper, who appeared to have forgotten all about Fanny, and every other trouble, and was talking very hard to Dr. Aston, getting a medical opinion for nothing, in an indirect manner, about her rheumatism, replied :

“Why, bless me, yes ; to be sure, the most comfortable little carriage I ever rode in upon an emergency—the true Swiss *char-à-banc*.”

And then she began to tell Dr. Aston all about it, explaining how her own carriage had broken down. But she did not say this last, until Skittler was out of hearing.

The tree looked too pretty to be pulled to pieces directly, so the donkey was taken out, and ridden back to the stables by Mr. Barnes, sitting the wrong way, with a helmet on ; and the Taglioni put back against the wall. And then the musicians had the nervous intelligence conveyed to them by a strong-minded guest that they were to prepare for Sir Roger de Coverley—which would be equivalent to hard labour for an hour at least ; and that there was no hope for a commutation of the sentence.

Sir Roger de Coverley has been often danced ; and always merrily, from the days of the good old knight himself ; but never with such glorious mirth as upon this occasion. And it lasted the full half-hour, and even beyond that,—for every one was obliged to join it at last—and when good Dr. Aston lead forth Mrs. Hamper, they all fairly hurrahed with glee. And when the fiddle got tired, the bass took up the tune all by himself, until the trombone came to the relief of both : and towards the end nothing was heard at all except the triangle, but they all danced just the same, until everybody was only in a condition to have been carried out and buried as decently as circumstances would permit.

Now came the distribution of the prizes on the tree. There were such beautiful things—gloves in walnut-shells, scent-boxes, little brooches, cornets of sugarplums, scissors, images, and trinkets ; and there was something appropriate to every body. Everybody too had to choose a gift for his last partner. The first comers took the most attractive-looking articles, but Christopher pulled a tiny parcel from a thick bough, where it had not been seen, and gave it to Patsy. And he said, “You must promise me to keep that, and not look at it, until I give you permission. And some day, I shall want it back again, but it will only be for a very little while.”

Again the dance went on ; and the candles, that had all burnt down, were renewed, even on the supper-table, at which everybody sat down once more, about four in the morning. How long they kept it up after this can only be guessed by the fact, that everybody who had been there to supper staid to breakfast : and that about daybreak, there came on such a heavy fall of snow, that the only express which reached the village said it was quite uncertain when anybody would be home at all.

But as Tom whispered to Bessy, "He didn't care a bit how things went on in London, and so voted they both ~~made themselves com-~~fortable."

Bessy was perfectly inclined to do this, and so was her husband, as he intended it to be understood, when he said to his pretty little wife—"For nothing very bad can happen, Bessy. We haven't an enemy in the world; and I've got you for ever, and Christopher will be a good friend to us, though he's turned out to be a great man, and come to his own again."

CHAPTER LXI.

GOOD BYE.

ALTHOUGH the curtain has fallen upon the last scene of our drama, there is still something to be told about the principal actors. And therefore we have to call them forward, and learn their destinies, once more before we finally dismiss them.

Lady Arden, with her son and daughter-in-law, went to reside at one of the havens for wrecked fortunes which France offers, immediately after the affair at Arden Court; having an ample income for their support. Young Arden, however, turned out very wild; beginning with outlawed horse-racers and billiard-players, and ending by coming over to England to ride a steeple-chase, winning it, selling the horse three separate times to three different people, receiving the money from each, and then bolting away and taking the horse with him. He has since joined the Austrian service; and nothing is now heard of his wife, who was seen at Baden last year: but, we regret to add, not with her husband.

Skittler has married the pretty maid, and is now the head-keeper upon the Arden property: and Hickory is appointed to one of the lodges, where he has a neat little cottage, and nothing to do but now and then to open a gate.

The Jolly Man was seen this year at Epsom Races in a four-wheeled chaise, and was overtaken, coming home, just as he was drawing up at the Cock, at Sutton, to give his good lady and Mr. and Mrs. Sprouts something cool, only to lay the dust in their throats which was uncommon, to be sure! And Mrs. Sprouts enjoyed it very much, but was only anxious to reach home, because she was sure baby would be getting so very fractious.

By this it will be seen that Tom's establishment is on the increase. And so is his business too. Christopher has given him enormous orders; and made over to him, as well, an unlimited commission for putting the whole of the library at Arden Court into a fit state: and this is a fortune in itself to him. Bessy is prettier than ever: and

always gentle and good tempered, and the baby is such a wonder, that if Tom had his own way he would put it in the window, amongst the Long Tom Coffins, and Wizards of the Wave, to be looked at. But Bessy laughs at him for being such a dear old stupid, and says that it would divert all the people's attention from some terribly insinuating dark blue drawn bonnets, with poppies or hops inside them, that have just appeared there.

Patsy has been placed, by Christopher, in an excellent Parisian school in the Champs-Élysées; in a charming situation, not so far removed, however, from the Jardin Mabille, but that now and then the sounds of an *al fresco* cornet can be plainly heard in something very like a waltz, to the great distraction of whatever studies the *pensionnaires* may be engaged in. Patsy, however, is working very hard, for a bright destiny is in store for her. Christopher often takes a trip to Paris, always calling to see her—indeed that is supposed to be in a great measure the object of his journey—and when, on his last visit, he told her that she might look into the little parcel he had taken for her, from the winter tree, you may judge how she blushed, and trembled and then turned pale upon discovery that it was a plain gold ring.

And Christopher himself—for we know him best still by that name—does not find the summer days even long enough for his happiness. He is universally beloved by all his neighbours—high and low alike: and will one of these days be a great man in the shire. The old house has been carefully restored—the old ladies and gentlemen cleaned up, and the armour sand-papered into its original state, and as, under the careful superintendence of Mr. Blandy, fresh property is every day being discovered—which Mrs. Hamper talks about directly amongst the circle of friends upon whom she quarters herself in her annual series of visits throughout the counties of Great Britain—the Arden estate will ultimately be one of the finest in England. He is furnishing every part of it with great taste; but amidst all his curiosities there is one he thinks more about than the whole of the others together. It is underneath a small glass shade in the drawing-room; and is simply a lump of rock salt from one of the largest of the Cheshire mines.

L'ENVOI.

A PREFACE is, I believe, usually written after the story is completed, and occasionally read, in like manner, although printed at the beginning of the book. But as I prefer rather to make it a certainty that these few words should not be seen until the reader has finished the story—inasmuch as by that time he may have become, in a measure, intimate with the Author, and more likely to sympathize with him in his remarks—I have placed what little more I had to say, in this position.

After sixteen months' communing with my friends, I hope they will believe me when I say that it is not without regret I lay down my pen at the conclusion of this story. I began it in fear and trembling—doubting my power to sustain a continuous tale unaided by other attractions; since the previous serials I had written had all been brought out in periodicals, wherein was to be found as well, a sufficiency of good and popular names to keep my own afloat, had it become too heavy to swim by itself. But as I proceeded, I gained courage: it was thought advisable to extend the story beyond the intended number of parts; and some of my acquaintances who read my book, began to speak of the characters as facts, until I firmly believed in them myself, and took as much interest in guiding their destinies as I would now vain hope the best-disposed of my readers did in following them.

I will not conceal the feeling of having been much pleased during the progress of "Christopher Tadpole" by the flattering notices of his adventures which appeared, from time to time, in the London and provincial papers. Having ever studiously avoided linking myself with any literary *clique*, and possessing but little, if indeed any, influence over the book-reviewing portion of the press, I need scarcely say that the monthly notices of my story by the gentlemen of that department were the more gratifying to me.

I must add, before we part, that the time occupied in writing the serial has been connected with many of my most agreeable associations. New scenes were visited in this period, and new connexions formed; and it gives me the greatest pleasure to express my acknowledgments for many kindnesses to my friends at Liverpool who received me with such hospitality—to a gentleman of Northwich, who was courteous enough to let me go down the Marston Mine after the men had left off their work, although he did not then know my object—to an esteemed friend with whom, in the coffee-room of the hotel at Chester, the first plan of the story was sketched out—and to my brother, whose good fellowship often kept up my spirits, when I fancied myself jaded and worn by the thousand troubles which compose together the anxious, restless existence of the literary man of the present day.

That portions of this story may raise a laugh round the home fire-side, or beguile one or two of the long evenings of the approaching winter is my sincere wish.

END.

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